



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

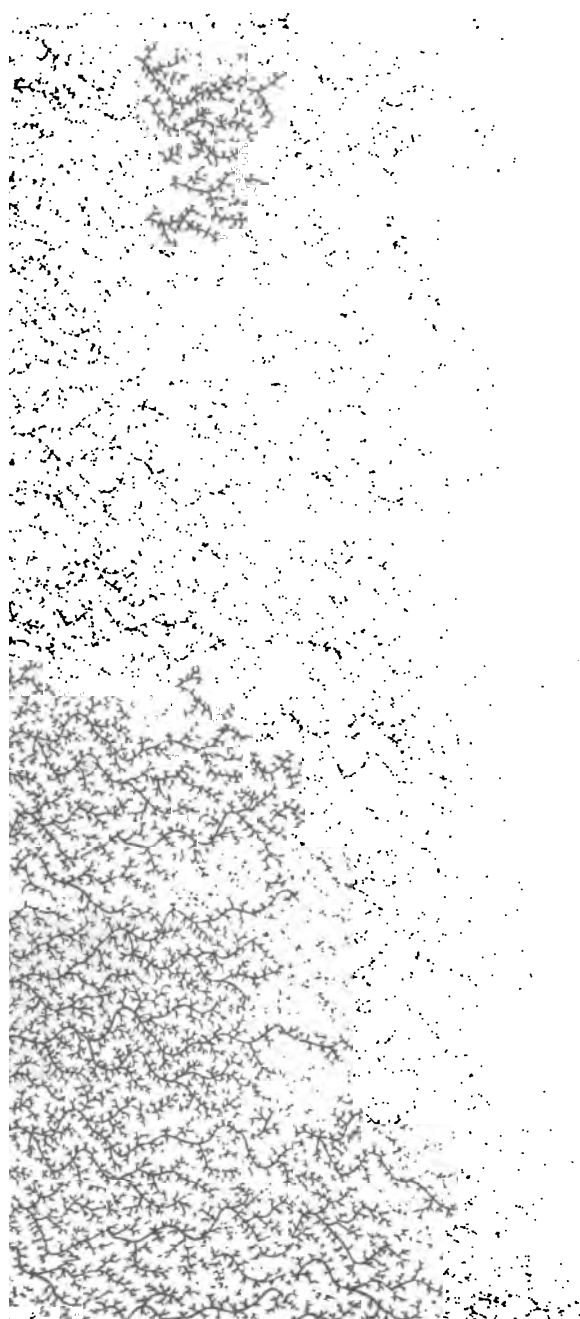
About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

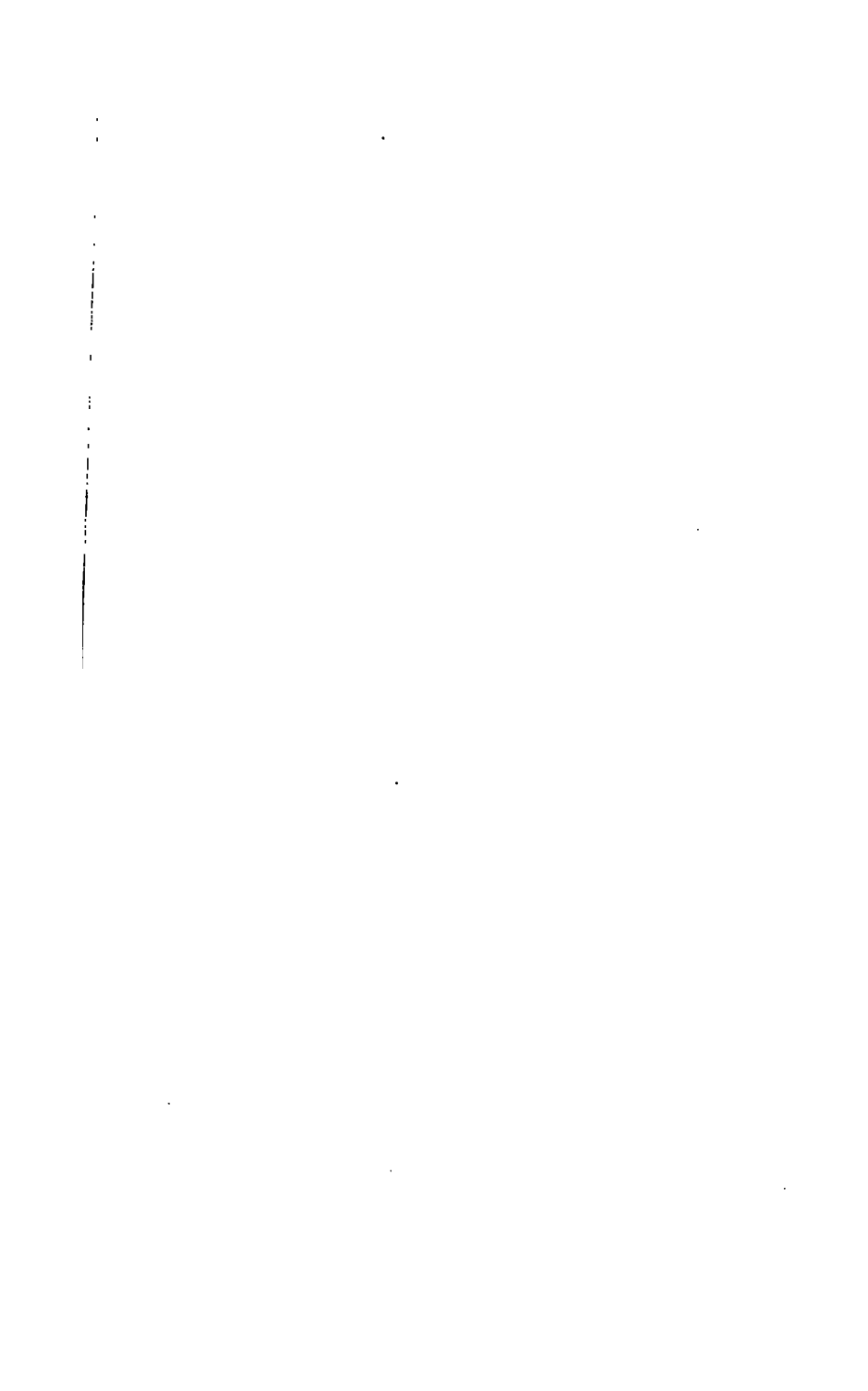
NYPL RESEARCH LIBRARIES



3 3433 07480063 6







A VENETIAN STUDY

IN BLACK AND WHITE

TO

A. I. M.

In Partial Discharge of a Debt of Gratitude

COPYRIGHT BY
WILLARD FRACKER & COMPANY

1889



*Love! every hour outspeeds a year
In thy fond presence, and to me
Life hath the ring of victory
When thou art come and thou, my life, art near.*

LIBRO MA POCO SERVE

IL CVORE DELLA DONNA E VN BEL

CHI NON LO



SA LEGGERE



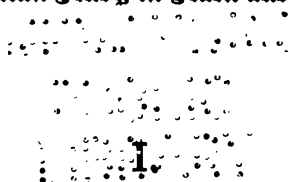


28841

THE
VENETIAN
STUDY
A VENETIAN STUDY
IN BLACK AND WHITE

May 2019
2019
Year 1

A Venetian Study in Black and White.



*Van's library in Washington square. Evening.
Books, etchings, charts, manuscripts and the
students' general paraphernalia strewn
about in helpless confusion.*

*'Honest Jack' Donalds kneel-
ing beside the blazing
pine-knot with the fam-
ous volume of Ari-
osto in his
hands.*

*Wherein Van at
last emancipates
himself from the
iron grip of that
pergamenian mys-
tery.*

"TAKE it, Jack, my good fellow: that's a sovereign deliverance, God bless you — take it out of my sight!"

"Shades of Pergamus! you are a mystic, Van, an unconscionable, unreasoning

paradox. I never knew you to be so overwhelmed of your caprices before this — so untowardly inconsistent, Van, never. Why, *you* always used to be the dispassionate one, *you* always used to play that vigorous role of Stoic amid all these volatile whims of fortune which we have shared so brotherlike between us. It was *I* who always played the freakish and fickle Cassius to your calm and better-judging Brutus; yes and played it often to my sorrow. And now up starts a vagary of yours, and you enshroud this simple, valuable, dear old volume of Ariosto with a most extravagant and morbid pall of mystery and fiction. Why, man, you do n't seem like yourself since —”

“Say no more, Jack, say no more about it, I beseech you. The sight of it strangles me — haunts me — suffocates me. That peculiar odor wreathes about me a sort of net-work of black-art — a sort of diabolic sortilege that I can no longer fight down — and leaves me helpless as a babe in the coils of a snake. No; take it away with you, Jack. In the influence of that thing I have become a perfect coward of apprehension — an

abandoned sort of fag to my gloomy forebodings, till horror seems now almost my daily meat and drink."

"Strange, Van, very, very strange. You are not well. You need fresh air and phosphates. You must become disillusioned of these unreasonable fictions."

"Ah, Jack, say not that there is no reason in these shrinking trepidations. There *is* reason ; vital beyond conjecture, sacred beyond reproof. It is torture to live beneath the same roof with that book ; the very sight of it stings and prods my usually confident and undaunted nature into most cowardly extreme. I confess this with all abject precipitancy that my heart feels and that my wit would dissemble if it could. Now, Donalds, look you : you are my friend. We have been brothers almost from the cradle ; you have a brave good heart, unsusceptible to any madcap trifling with the unseen but ever-present. You are an honest doubter in all these madmen's trumperies — thank your patron planet — so do me the honor that you would a friend, and if not so much, show me the mercy and indulgence I ask, that you would a pagan in the

meshes of his abhorrent fetichisms, and rid me of this audacious pest, never intimating by word or look in the future, that that volume bears my finger-marks, or the touch of my pen ; for that which you hold in your very hands, Jack — believe me ; do n't take your eyes from mine with that sceptic betrayal—that very pergamena-bound volume of Ariosto is the one vulnerable vantage-place of all my brave days, of all my indomitable, unalarming nature. There and only there the Destinies may strike, and strike disaster to the heart. Now go while you have it in your embrace ; go leave me alone a little time."

"My dear fellow, calm yourself. What rashness — what terrorism — what impetuosity, and from you too, Van, my patron saint of pluck and intrepidity! Well, well ; that it should come to this! You do n't know what a present you are giving me. See! my dear fellow, this is the most rare and valuable edition of the venerable satirist extant. Look, you! *Ariosto: Orlando Furioso: Venezia: 1566.* Why, man, this volume toward which you have fostered so extraordi-

mary an aversion is the second of the series, all bound alike in Venetian parchment. The set is ruined if I rob the first and third of their precious link."

"Better rob me of the volume than suffer the volume to rob you of a friend. Do you want it to do that?"

"Well, no ; I can't exactly say I do."

"Well, then ; you must believe me when I say that companionship with this spleen-breeding *incubus* will yet drive me to some desperate, and for aught I know, some criminal extreme. You need not shrink ; it is the truth—the vital truth. Such things are, and such things have come upon abler men than we are, be assured."

"But why have you not destroyed it—burned it—thrown it into the sewers or strewn it to the four winds long ago?"

"Burn it?—destroy it? Why, man, if I could recount to you the history of night after night of watching and sleepless wondering on that very couch, while opposite me on the shelf the two wild eyes of that strange apparition stared upon me with the gripping spell of a snake or a fiend, commanding me, turn

whithersoever I may, crushing me with a single glance!—burn it? Why, it was only a few nights ago that, overcome by the weird incantation, and with a mad resolve to snatch the horrible thing from its ‘bad eminence’ and dash it into the fire, I leaped from that very couch and snatched it down, and, clenching it in my two hands thus, bore it to the blazing grate. I held it over the fire: I could not drop it. I trembled like a leaf, yet fought like a panther to crush this appalling monster whose fascination would yet prove the maddening of me. No; it was no use. The strange book would not leave my hands; I could not unclench my fingers; they were like iron. I plunged it into the flames and fell fainting with the torture right there where your feet lie. When I recovered it was morning. I arose, and though terribly weak and severely burned, I fell on my knees thanking God that I had conquered the mystery, destroyed the book, and I was a free man once more. I went back to the grate; the ashes were stone cold; on the charred heap lay that volume of Ariosto unsinged, unharmed. Think of it?—no,

don't look so incredulous ; this is fact."

"Well, well ; Van, you are a grim sort of humorist after all. I thought you utterly devoid of that fertile quality which we Americans almost make our religion of now, — namely, wit. Why, you have the most prodigal humor....but no ; I will say no more. I will not say that I disbelieve you, nor commit myself too severely in behalf of your hallucination. You are a sick man : I can see that. I will indulge you with the most meritorious of grace, be assured. As for the book, you know I have a theory in regard to it."

"A theory — eh? Well, Jack there is a theorizable something about that old pergamena-bound volume for the gowned fiends — yes, the wisest, damndest of them, my good reasoner, to hold a clinic over ; something most inconceivably yet convincingly strange, which you, of all men, I am assured, will stand demanding and unsusceptible before....Burn it? — why, man, I have tried to crush it into oblivion by every rational stratagem ; but it will not crush. Only the other night, Jack, let me confess it, I sat right in that

chair till far into the morning, staring like a witless imbecile at that second volume of Ariosto, and I would to God a thousand times that vision-stricken night, that I had the physical bravery to endure it calmly, or the moral courage to cast it there into the flames. But no; I was slave of a stronger, conquering influence. Every time I made brave and dashed to the task, the very touch frightened me. It does not feel like the real pergamenta: it is smoother, oilier, has a peculiar grain, and, more than all to convince one of its mystery—that peculiar something of its own quite inexplicable,—and that odor—bah!.... so, I simply sat through the whole haunted night, and stared at it like a fool. There; that is abject enough confession to satisfy an Inquisition."

"Ah, Van, my kind fellow, you are not well. No well man could talk such veritable nonsense, let me too confess with serious candidness. You must not stay here longer. Why did n't you go back to Italy with Boswilk, or take a jaunt over the Sierras, abandoning this stuffy little workshop for the spiritual freedom that bodily freedom privileges you? Look

about you and marvel not at my philosophy. Here you are seven months at a stretch, castled up in this little attic dungeon with some six thousand wrangling poets, metaphysicians and what not, all shelved and gowned in this funereal yellow parchment, as if every one of them was wearing sackcloth and ashes for your delinquent soul, staring upon you with complacent but conquering eyes,—surely this is all madman's food when taken in such intemperate draughts, if naught else may be. Come; what say you to a tramp through the Berkshire Hills for ten days?"

"Good!—excellent . . . but hold!—upon one condition and that condition only."

"Any condition; a dozen—a score of them if you demand, my good friend, anything that will assure this generous acquiescence."

"That you will take this old pergamena-bound volume, which seems to bear something of irretrievable fascination to you, and may it prove something as fortuitous of good as it has proven to me a forebodement of evil."

"Fortuitous? Why, man, that word has long dropped out of my repertory. Misfortune alone has ever proven the new Atlantis so diligently sought — the same old crone in a new habit and ragged canonical. Nothing brings me good fortune, and surely nothing could bring me worse fortune than Nature her sweet self curst me with since my puny days. But let that pass; you are a generous fellow, truly. Here am I, begging of you a few days' perusal of this weird volume which so fascinates me, even as it has you, though not to a degree of aversion, and you deliberately tender me the book with your imploring compliments. Well; if I am honored any startling secrets, or if some solemn revealment of the gods is here blest me in the chronicles of this grey-beard old poet, I shall certainly hail you."

"Ah, my good friend, look not for revealments within those venerable boards, for with the contents I am by this sustained period quite well acquainted. It is not the spirit of Ariosto that will reveal to you any of the chosen secrets; it is another—who? I know not—scarcely care. It may yet prove the

evil genius of the contemporaneous times for ought I know —”

“But where may I look for the prophetism if not within the volume? Certainly little mystery could cling to the parchment cover of a sealed book. Where else may I look, pray?”

“Anywhere the gloom-spirit moves you. Certainly the fascination that proves itself with such satisfying precision will lead your searching steps aright.”

“But what is that which so conquers you? Is it the odor that so effects and illusions your imagination? Certainly it has not an offensive odor, though distinct and extraneous enough to start one romancing in a very different channel. To nothing indeed can I liken it; it is even more strange than the parchment’s grain and touch, all these qualities differing from those of the other volumes. Yet, what acute sense must be yours to construe so innocent an odor to so loathing a significance. You ought to have been born blind, Van, pardon the clumsy observation; you ought, upon my word, cultivating your faculty as a prodigy and turning it to the conventional ducat-

breeding account. Why not ?”

“Yes, Jack, I am something of a hound after all — we all come back to the beasts of the field and fowls of the air for our similes — but I think I could recognize all of my friends and half the locations I visit, should I have recourse but to this one sense. It is often of vast convenience, yet as in this case, not unoften the author of vast annoyance.”

“Then smelling so ably into the past, Van, why not something of a naso-palatine prophet — eh ? Why not smell into the future as well ? — smell forwards as well as backwards — do n’t you see ?”

“You jest at very perilous venture, Jack. You are ungenerous. But let me tell you this : I can smell death — yes, and a great way off !”

“Death ? — ”

“Death ! — ”

“That ’s a strange word more strangely spoken, Van. Smells this old parchment Ariosto then of death ?”

“It smells of the sepulchre, Jack Donalds ; it has the breath of crime, of ruin, of hell upon it, believe me. The smell of death is familiar : these are not....

But say no more lest you account me too abject a fool. Say no more ; take it : this is my own and my devoutest wish which now amounts to a command. I abhor it !”

“What a fatal shame, Van, thus to poison up our bright old satirist in such a death-smelling shroud, and so heap upon obloquy and all the swift lashings of oblivion, the burning images of perdition and shame ! Ha, ha ! Van, ‘thou almost mak’st me waver in my faith to hold opinion with Pythagoras’ that the soul’s of devils should infuse themselves in the covers of books. ‘What fools these mortals’ — why man, to look into that glamourish face of yours blazing like a beacon through some swooping thunder-cloud, one would think your young bones were nurtured on malignant mystery, and that you sat at meat daily with these trifles which you magnify into formidable fiends in pergamena canonicals. Why, Van, whoever thought that your pale silvery brow had ever been oxidized in the Bengali jungles ? — that you had faced many a throttling Tartar with your good broadsword, or, most celestial apex

of your crowning achievements, been to Congress and Canada? Bless me! what a craven has our genial young Titan suddenly proven!"

"Jack, you're an unconscionable trifler. Now see here; 'respect the load,' as Napoleon said, 'respect the load.' You do n't wish to make mine heavier, or fell any of your straggling witticisms in my pathway. Yov do n't know what you are doing. I do n't want you to stay here any longer. You must respect my wishes in the matter of the *Orlando*. As long as it is in this house, I shall play the only role capable for me, — that of a craven — a fool — a madcap if you will, Jack Donalds, but always the gentleman. Take that away, and I shall be my braver, better self again. Then let who will call me 'coward.'"

"Well, really, Van, I meant no harm, my generous old comrade, God bless you, no.... But remember now, the Berkshire Hills...."

"When shall we venture?"

"Day after to-morrow."

"Why, Jack, that's hangman's day."

"A thousand times better, you super-

stitious young gloom-martyr. Electricity-man's day now, you know ; 'hang-man's' is obsolete, or at least obsolescent. They do n't hang any more, do n't you know, you self-expatriated solitary, they do n't hang — they electrocute. Sit 'em down !— sponge to the neck !— wire to the left leg !— fipp !— snap !— eternity. Next !see ? Must be a jolly sensation."

"Yes, must be, very. Why do n't you try it, Jack ?"

"Kindly sarcasm, this, indeed. I would not mind trying it if St. Peter would let me come back and tell you about it ; but this uncertainty of the thing, don't you see ?...."

"Are you sure it is St. Peter who would have the jurisdiction in the matter ?"

"Sometimes I think yes, sometimes I think no. If I should be found in your company when Gabriel trumps the ace, I think no ; otherwise, yes."

"Gabriel will trump the deuce, not the ace, when he trumps you, Jack Donalds. But, I say, the Berkshire —"

"Certainly ; it will do you a world of

good. Stop! you poor, sour, solemn, mysterious old goblin-eater, do n't you look at me like that. Why, it would give me the dismals to stay castled up here with you.... But remember, Van, remember, Friday, the Berkshire Hills. I'll make something more than a pandemonium of snakes out of you."

"Nonsense, Jack put that odious volume under your cloak where it will cease to poison the air, and then —"

"Then what?"

"Go! I am in no mood for your trumperies. Time enough for them, time enough for them later."

"Very well; the Berkshire Hills, remember. Good-bye. Van, you death-wooing occultist!"

"Good bye, you tantalizing sceptic.... and may the good Lord have mercy on his soul. At last—at last! It is gone. That one malady—that one thorn in my side—that one poison-breeding thing of evil that has nurtured more anguish in my heart than a thousand remorse could foster in the soul of a penitent murderer—that one sly triumph of some witted fiend, is gone, gone, gone! At last, thank

God, I am a free man! Jack Donalds! the saints keep you. Let us see what this monster breeds in your hands!...."

II.

Before the old Donalds' mansion. Pouring rain. Van rapping violently for admittance. Bagley, Jack's pompous valet, slow to the rescue.

In which Van learns the first chapter of this disorganizing history of Jack Donalds and his book.

"Hi — there! Bagley."

"Directly, sir, directly ;

them bolts slides wery heavy, sir, wery."

"Bolts? — he's got the house bolted, eh? Why, it looks like a Bridewell penitentiary. Jack Donalds, something is going wrong with you.... Hi — there! Bagley; let me in, I say.... Why, what do you mean by keeping me in martyrdom in the drenching rain pounding my knuckles raw on this old oak door?"

"Wery sorry, sir, wery ; but you see as 'ow it is, sir —"

"See what? — you ass. Look-a-here,

look at me, I say! I 'm wet through and through standing at that door waiting for you to answer my easily recognizable thump. You do n't mean to say that you have not learned it by this time — eh?"

"Wery sorry, sir, wery; but —"

"Where's the door-bell, Bagley?"

"h'It 's gan, sir!"

"'Gan,' is it? — well, where is it 'gan' to?"

"Gan to thunder, sir."

"Indeed? — good place for a door-bell. Who took it off?"

"Marter Jack took it h'off, sir."

"Oh, he did — did he? Well, what's a house without a door-bell? let me question of the alms-asking Destinies.... Bagley, what's the matter with you? Why, you look like an underdone North-umberland ghost fried in some witches' kitchen of the Inferno. Stop ogling me in that cabalistic, phylacteric manner! What are you trying to do? — charm me? You can't do it, Bagley, you can't charm me as long as your breeches do n't hide your ankles, and you go about in your stocking feet with your five toes and a heel out of them both —"

"But, sir, 'e makes me go without my boots, sir. He won't even let me wear my goloshes, sir."

"Why not?—what's got into Jack?—what's the matter with this whole house anyway?—it smells like a den of nightmares. Has Jack joined the Anarchists?"

"h'I do n't know wot them be, sir."

"Do n't eh?—well, here's a couple of quarters: you've been in this country long enough to know what 'them be,' I hope. Yes, you're out of the land of tizzies, and tibs, and bobs, and quids, and all that now. Where is Master Donalds?"

"h'Out, sir!"

"Out?"

"h'Out!"

"Then why in the world did n't you tell me so long ago?"

"You did n't give me time, sir."

"And he is not at home then?"

"No, sir; he is—no, sir; that is, sir,he is not at home, sir!"

"Say, Bagley, look here!—you need n't look offended. Do you know what I am? I'm a mind reader. You know what that is?—it's a fellow that can read your thoughts before you can think them

yourself ; see ? Now, Bagley, every time you open your mouth I can see right down through your epiglottis into your heart."

"Lord bless me, sir."

"Well, sir, do you know what I see ?"

"Well, I can't say that h'I do, sir."

"Well, sir, I see that you are lying to me,—deliberately lying, Bagley. Master Jack Donalds *is* at home."

"Well, sir, I h'only knows wot 'e told me, sir !"

"Oh, he told you he was not at home, did he ? Ah, what delicious faith ? Why you could remove mountains with that faith, Bagley, if, like Archimedes, you had whereon to stand. Do n't look so stupid ; that is n't Greek. Suppose, Bagley, that I should tell you that at this very moment I am in heaven ; you 'ld believe it on my simple declaration, would n't you ?"

"Certainly, sir, an' ef it would n't be too much of a job, I 'd 'ave ye look oop me record !"

"Oh, well, I 'd rather not be mistaken in heaven as your private secretary, and besides, if your record is as red as your

nose, you wont get there. You can't sneak a red nose into heaven, Bagley —"

"Then h'I'll cut it h'off, sir."

"What! a noseless angel? — shades of Giotto and John Ruskin! . . . But say; did Jack say anything about going to the Berkshire Hills to day? — this is Friday, you know."

"'E did say something about it, sir, but —"

"But what?"

"But 'e a' n't a-goin', sir. I thinks, to tell the h'actual truth, h'I thinks 'e's h'ill, sir; wery h'ill. Ah, sir, God bless you, if you could see the way as Marter Jack takes on, sir, ah, God bless you, h'I thinks you would chain 'im h'up, that h'I do, sir. Wery strange indeed for Marter Jack to take on so, sir, wery!"

"Ill, eh? What's the matter with him? — tell me all about it, Bagley."

"I d'no, sir, wot's the matter with 'im. 'E's 'ad no sleep o' these three nights, Jack has n't, sir, none at all. 'E seems to be wery much anxieted about somfing, sir, God bless me, h'I do n't know wot, sir. It makes me feel wery bad to see poor Marter Jack so duncast an' kind of

melancrolly, y' see, sir."

"Indeed? Since when has this all come upon him? Surely this is very strange for so light-hearted and jovial a gallant as Jack Donalds. Since when has this come upon him?"

"Since the night afore the day afore yisterday, sir. 'E' cum h'in with a h'old book under 'is cloak, sir, and then began them pranks, sir, from that very moment."

"Oh, I have it all. God help him! he too is magnetized by the same old Devil's load-star. What a fool was I not to have destroyed that pergamena volume of Ariosto!... What does he do, Bagley, that so mystifies you?"

"Why, sir, 'e mutters to 'imself the day through an' the night through about sech devil-like things as would scare a night-'ound, sir. 'E is alone all the time, sir, took the bell h'off the door, sir, killed his dog, sir, pulled down the blind, sir, lighted the gas, sir, makes me go round like a skelped monk, sir, in these 'ere riggins as would disgrace a bloody h'ox, sir, keeps 'imself locked h'up in that back library, sir, forever a-doin' somefin' h'awful mysterious, sir, h'awful. Why, bless

my soul ! When 'e wants anythin' 'e 'owls it through the key 'ole at me, sir, an' yesterday 'e kept me runnin' me bloody legs h'off, sir, a-buyin' h'up micerscopes, an' telerscopes, an' phonoscopes, an' h'all the rest o' them spook businesses an' Yankee trumperies, an' there e' sits h'all day long, buried neck-deep in them instruments an' things, a-tryin' to find out some bloody mystery or other, sir, eats a bit o' biscuit an' stilton, drinks a wee drappie o' sherry or the likes, sir, an' that 's h'all. God bless us ! — I'm much a-feared, sir, that somefin is gone wrong about Marter Jack's 'ead, sir, h'I do ! ”

“ Is it possible, Bagley ? Poor fellow ! you are distressed. And does he work at his books all this time ? ”

“ Bless me, no ; h'only this one book, sir, h'only this one. 'E 'as read it through and through and through ; but h'I expects 'e did n't get h'all 'e wanted, so 'e 'as tore the book apart, sir, h'all to bits, sir, as if 'e war lookin' for something werry superstitious, werry. ”

“ Well, Bagley, do n't exercise yourself any more. He's all right, as you will see. Tell him I called, and ask him to

appoint a time when I can call and find him 'at home.' Keep a good watch that no harm comes to him, Bagley. Here's another quarter. Good bye, Bagley. Let me know if anything extraordinary happens. You can visit me without his knowing it."

"That h'I will, sir, 'if the worser comes to the worstest' as y' say h'over 'ere. Good bye, sir, and God bless y'!"

"Good bye, Bagley.... The saints shield him! That man, Bagley, is undergoing an ordeal. Something serious has happened. There is a tragedy smouldering under poor old Bagley's ragged coat.... Ah, why did the Fates withhold from me the courage to destroy that death-smelling incubus while it was yet in my possession?.... God help us! what will this ugly indiscretion of mine yet bring forth? Let us await the sequel."

III.

*Van's study again. Midnight. Jack
Donalds enters unperceived by his
friend who lies before the
blazing grate.*

*Wherein a glimpse
of light illumines the
weird paradox, yet
estranges two firm
friends forever.*

"BLESS my soul! Jack Donalds, is that you?.... What a spectre you have become in these few tragic days! Let me light the gas; it is so dark —"

"No!...."

"No?—why not? I can scarcely see the outlines of your face in the dying firelight. Sit down there, you mysterious nightmare, sit down. I have been lying here for hours, Jack, dreaming wondering, yes, and worrying not a little about you, till evening has given way to midnight, contriving a way that I might pry open your den of dismals and pry myself within; and here you burst upon my vision-building like some apparition of the lower world. There!—that's much brighter. That's a veritable, pedigreed and blooded pine-knot that chunk

I threw into the open grate just then. See! — what a delicious glow. I had a hundred pine-knots sent down from our camp in the Adirondacks. What companionship I used to find in them! I declare; when I came back here to the square and sat staring at this stupid grate, it seemed quite impossible to think. The Unseen was not to be contemplated through so shabby and unhallowed a port-hole. Bah! — did anthracite ever inspire a delicious, Alnaschar-like dream at the heart of anything capable a fine flight of fiction? You see, now that that indomitable heathen ghost of an Ariosto is out of here, I am my old self again. I improvise on like an oriental — what! closer to me Jack; let me look into your face.... (God save us! what a change). Jack, you mysterious old imp, you frighten me."

"An apparition of the lower world did you say, Van? Well, truly: if ever the fiends counterfeited any of this gloom-mothered race of mysteries, certainly I feel well enough sunken in the mood to be capable to the utmost.... Give me something to drink, Van, I am so thirsty.

No ; give me something to eat ; I am famished. No, no ; give me a cigar : I must smoke. . . . No, I do n't want to smoke ; I do n't know what I do want. I am all unstrung. What a fool am I to talk this way ! Oh, Van, my good fellow, it seems as if this taut-drawn nervous strain would yield and drop me over this horrible, horrible verge upon the brink of which a single hair constrains me ! . . . Oh, I — I am so tired, so weary, so exhausted ! Why, man, I hav' n't slept an hour since my last visit a week or ten days ago. Bagley said you called ; I was so sorry that I could not let you in at that moment ; but to confess it all in the most generously straight-forward manner, I dared not reveal to you my condition of mind and body ; I — I simply *dared* not, that is all !”

“Donalds, you are a sick man. I do n't like these rattling aberrations — these leaping sort of explosives from a man of your splendid mental discipline. What has come upon you, Jack, my good fellow ? — Come, to the point !”

“I have not yet come to the point — the truly vital one, or I would unbosom

all to you. God help me, I have striven toward that seemingly impossible point I would I might reveal to you, first with the curiosity of a scholar, then with the ardor of a conscious enthusiast, and finally with the desperation of a madman, striving against that which heaven designed should stand unrevealed. But I am further,—ah, must I confess this to myself even?—I stand further removed from the truth it seems than ever. I am simply a mental wreck; and it bids disastrously promising to see me a spiritual wreck as well: for come to the point no closer, I think I could stake my eternity in its solving with as calm and still as passionate a spirit as I have pursued it in the last ten days.”

“My dear fellow, calm yourself. Why do you writhe about in that old arm chair which stands so inviting of ease to ordinary mortals? These are very mysterious rantings for so warrior-like, unperturbed a spirit as that God blest Jack Donalds. You are not a man of grave-stone thoughts nor blinking aberrations; you, so light-hearted and happy, Jack! Why, you know, old boy, that therein is our mutual

esteem so affectionately proven, — because of my melancholy which you, mistaking wretch, seem fascinated by, and which I would to God you would fascinate out of me ; and because of your unconscious light heart and sort of an ever-ready picnic humor which I would equally as devout, I might fascinate into my own dismal, solitary gloom-logic. But come Jack ; what are you seeking ? what gives you this horrible thirst that demands satiation even at the price of a soul ? What inspires this profane incantation before some fallen god ? ”

“ I believe it — indeed, I half believe it *is* a fallen god, — an arch-traitor to heaven, now that you confront me with the ready argument, — that stands entreating, enticing me on, on, on ; and yet shall I see nothing gained ? — all lost ? . . . Ah, my good comrade, we must part ; I fear for a long, long time. I am going abroad.”

“ You ? — back to Munich ? ”

“ No ; to Italy this time.”

“ Alone ? ”

“ Alone ! ”

“ In your condition of mind and body,

Jack ? You do not mean to say that ?”

“Verily !”

“Then God bless you, sir, if you have anything to say ere the grave shuts between us, say it now !”

“Why say you that ?”

“Because your going abroad in your present mental excitement, means simply this much and nothing short of it. You must not attempt it, and certainly not alone. Where do you go ? — seeing you are so determined ?”

“To Venice.”

“My dear old Venice ?” I — I will go with you, Jack ; say that you will not go alone, and that I may accompany you !”

“Ah, Van, good fellow, I fear I shall be obliged to nip that sweet outburst in its prime. I *must* go alone. Not a soul in Venice knows me, and if you were to accompany me, why man, all Venice knows you, and all Venice would have their several probosces in my business which will not comfortably entertain more than one.”

“Not even mine, Jack ?”

“Not yet, my friend, not yet for a

while....No, no ; do not cross me ; I am in a most stricken mood to be crossed or thwarted in any of my designs. I must go alone, for more oppressive but convincing reasons than one....But let that pass ; I came not here to tell you anything, Van, I only came to ask you three questions, and you must answer, -- under oath upon all that you hold precious to your exalted days, my good conqueror, you must answer me ! ”

“ You could not make my word to such as you, Jack Donalds, more solemn and bounden to the truth by any of your oath-takings. Say on ; say on. I will answer you as best becomes me.”

“ Can you not anticipate my question ? ”

“ Perhaps my rough conjecture may prove to the point. But why tantalize me with your mysterious hesitations ? — say on ! ”

“ I hesitate, for I have not the courage, my good fellow, — am only half brave enough to approach you with these vital searchings, lest you give me an answer that I do not hope for.”

“ Ah, well ; the book perhaps, — the

second volume of the Lombard satirist!...."

"Yes, yes;— God shield me!"

"Why do you start?— what is there in the Lombard master that should so appall you?"

"Nothing!— yes, no.... I do n't know! Do n't cross me, Van, be plain, — be brieftell me!"

"Tell you what?— you madcap! Out with it!....What do you want?....I wait!....Why do n't you speak? Make your mysteries plain to me. Jack, you are a silly, cowardly—"

"Stop!— for God's sake, my dear friend and brother, do n't speak that way to me. I must be humored like a child, like a fool, — yes, like a dog, if you demand it, Van, only for this little time — only for now. Be kind, Van, be your own dear, generous self, and humor me as you might a thing you pity! I will be brave. Tell me now, what do you know about that book?— what did the legatura of whom you bought it, know about it?— what did the man *he* bought it of, know about this death-smelling pergamena? There! you have it all. Answer

me briefly — answer me quickly !”

“ Briefly can I answer you as to *my* knowlege ; more briefly as to his of whom I purchased the fated volume, and most briefly as to the knowledge of any beyond in the chain of succession. As to mine, that old copy of Ariosto was one of a series I bought in Florence and added to my library which I had taken to Venice for study ; and when I had the twelve or fifteen hundred volumes bound in this ancient yellow parchment, after the style of those magnificent chronicles in the Venetian Archive, this, of course, was one of the number. Now for he knowledge of the legatura who bound it : I wanted the set by a certain time, which duty he promised me, but he failed to keep his promise. He bound the first and third volumes, but could find no more pergamena of the proper age to match. Finally an old Greek testament turned up — an odd volume that had laid about for years, and about which there seemed to cling some coloring of mysterious history. The shade matched, and though its peculiar smoothness and still more peculiar, and to some people offensive,

odor, led him to believe that it was a rare old quality of parchment, he knew nothing further than was told him by the lady, one of the illustrious house of Antonio Selini, who gave it him. So much for his knowledge and mine. As for that of any of its predecessors, you will have to look up the records, find out where the Selinis were buried, and interrogate their several ghosts, if they are still extant."

"Do not trifle, my dear confessor, this is serious—vitally serious. What say you was the name of that Antonio?"

"Selini!"

"Selini? . . . Van! are you sure it was Selini?"

"Verily; Selini! Why should that startle you so?"

"A tragic name—a criminal name in the chronicles of my ancestors?"

"Yours, man?"

"Mine. I never told you this, but it is the truth: I am a lineal descendant of the good Doge Dondolo!"

"Nonsense, Donalds? . . . Donalds—Dondolo, well, well! there is a certain conformity. But what under heavens has

that to do with this death-smelling parchment Ariosto?"

"Everything — all ! Selini was a conspirator, — a co-conspirator, according to the chronicles, with the son of Dondolo, and also a rival in a most desperate love-affair. It was at that barbarous period of history when a man might slip a piece of paper upon which was written an accusation, into a hole in the wall of the Doge's Palace — you remember the very spot, it is still shown you — and the accused was called up, tried by a masked Council of Three, and ninety-nine chances to one, woke up the next morning well launched upon eternity, his body swinging by the neck over the palace balcony. Dondolo was thus accused by his co-conspirator Selini, thrown into one of those horrible dungeons, tried after terrible suffering, and hanged between the Byzantine pillars on the Piazzetta. Now to the point ! The pergamena that bound this volume of Ariosto is not animal parchment !"

"Good God ! — man, what absurdity !"

"Not at all, not at all ! I have examined it to my most satisfying assurance. I have tested it by every scrutiny of

science, by every solvent chemistry boasts, and it is proven me. That smooth, oily, death-smelling parchment is nothing other than human skin, and, what is more—

“Well, well! — what more?”

“Yes, I am brave enough to say it, — it is the identical skin torn from the body of Marco Dondolo, son of the good Doge Dondolo, — my ancestor!”

“Heavens! Donalds, you frighten — you amaze me! I think I had better light the gas for fear that you prove yourself a ghost, or strangle me with some of your death-breathing surprises.”

“No, no; sit still. Let me tell you all.”

“ And — and is there more?”

“Only a little, confirming what I have said. You know it to be an historical fact that those barbaric lovers of the horrible used to amuse themselves with most cruelly insane whims, and every machinery that sharpened to a desperate point, their sensitive, southern imaginations. That they resorted to most astounding measures to satisfy their delights in things of mystery. For instance, the thigh-bone of a conspirator against a certain Doge, was made into sword-handles for that august

personage's body-guard. The skin of a dethroned Emperor was made into magnificent, gold mounted snuff-boxes for the usurper and his council; and why not the skin of Marco Dondolo to bind a Greek testament? These things are significant, I must confess, but why not as true as proven truth in other mysteries."

"Ah! Donalds, to what base uses may we return! I declare, Jack, you amaze me beyond measure. I shall expect you to-morrow to bring me the veritable bung-hole stopped up with the dust of Alexander, according to Hamlet's discouraging."

"Van, you are an unfeeling wretch,—a rank Pyrrhonist. I shall say no more. I shall go to my room and bury myself till I have solved all, and you need not call upon me, for I sha'n't be in...." adieu!"

"Donalds, hold on!—one moment. I meant no harm, old fellow,—stop!....

"I will not; you have insulted me!"

"I? Jack Donalds, I have insulted—Jack! stay a moment longer. Tell me—Donalds.... stop!.... Impossible! he is gone. God help him! God help him!

Jack Donalds is in peril"

IV.

The entrance of the Donald's mansion.

*Wherein Van enters
into a secret com-
pact with the much-
abused Bagley.*

"Good morning, Bagley.
Is Master Jack in?"

"I 'ardly dare h'answer, sir!"

"Ah, and a knowing fellow are you beginning to prove yourself. That's right; do n't say he is out when he is in,—at least, do n't say so to me. But Bagley, how came those dark rings under your stalwart British optics, say? You look so sad and melancholy. What's the poison that has leaked into your poor old soul, Bagley? Has Master Jack been ill-treating you?"

"h'Oh, no! sir, h'oh no; by no means, sir. Lord, sir, 'e's a h'angel, e' is. He never is downright shabby to me, sir, but o' late, 'e is so strange, sir, so uncommon strange, that I have more 'n I can do, sir, to keep from running away from 'im sir."

"Why, Bagley, what can you mean by all this?"

"I 'ardly knows m'self, sir. Somethink 'as 'appened to Marter Jack, somethink desperate h'inside o' him, somethink 'orrible! Why, sir, 'e sits up the whole blessed night a-talkin' to 'imself, sir, as no sane mon, an' then he figgers, an' figgers, an' figgers, an' fumbles, an' makes as if he war fightin', sir, an' then a-lovin' somebody, an' then he squints through them telerscopes, an' mikerscopes an' things, an' laughs, an' cries, an' do n't h'eat,— not a smitch does 'e h'eat, sir."

"Bless me, Bagley, are you telling me the truth?"

"The truth?— why, sir, y' du n't know 'alf o' it. If you 'ad to sleep wi''im one night an' listen to them carryins on! Ah, 'e's the most changedest mon, sir; 'e's not 'imself in one solitary partic'lar; h'it's jist as ef some devil 'rother 'ad slid into them young bones an' made an h'old mon o' 'im a'ready."

"Very strange is all this, Bagley!"

"'E makes me sleep on a heap o' rugs on the floor, sir, in one corner o' 'is lab'tory, an' ah, sir, 'ard is the bed an' 'or-

rible is the sleep h'I gets. h'I 'm a-feared 'o my life, for a fac'; I dar' n't go to sleep a minute, sir. Every time I h'opens my eyes, there 'e sits at his books, holdin' that skin thing afore the light, an' he keeps a-readin' somethink through it!"

"Through what, Bagley?"

"Do n't get h'excited, sir, I begs; I gets quite enough of that when I 'm wi' 'im. Yes, sir, the bloody skin thing 'e tore h'off that book you gave 'im—and h'it's got a h'awful peculiar smell,—sort o' deady, do n't you know!"

"Well, well; what about it? What does he hold it to the light for?"

"I dunno. 'E stretched it on a frame, sir, and when 'e 'olds it afore the light, 'e 'owls and 'owls with— with a sort of triumph, h'I expects."

"Triumph?—triumph at what?"

"Why, at the 'oles, I expects, sir."

"What holes?—"

"Why, sir, there's billions of little worm-holes or somethink 'r other through that skin, sir,—little 'oles like as made with a pin, sir; and 'e makes dozens of copies of them, throws the copies into the was'-basket, and then keeps on mak-

ing more. Ah, God help me, sir—"

"Impossible!—what can it all mean?"

"I can't h' imagine, sir, h'it's 'orrible strange — 'orrible!"

"See here, Bagley, you'r a good fellow; here's a five dollar gold piece; that's worth nearly a guinea, Bagley, and it's all yours, every bit of it, if you rescue one of those copies out of the paper-basket. I would like to see what they look like. If he does not invite me into his secret as a friend, I shall steal in as an enemy. Get one of those copies and send it to me, and this bright, pretty piece of convenience is yours!"

"h'All right, sir, directly, directly, God bless y', a dozen o' 'em ef you wish; but mind you, ef you go as crazy as Marter Jack over the bloody nightmare, don't you blame Phil Bagley."

"Never mind, never mind; do as I say and leave the rest to me. Hush! now; do n't tell Master Jack that I called to-day; you need n't say a word about it. Just rescue one of those papers for me, take it around, and if I am not at home, leave it with my man John. Understand?"

"h'I understands perfectly, sir, perfectly. Thank you, Marter Van ; and if I 'ave any serious to-do with Marter Jack, sir, I may call upon you for 'elp, sir !"

"For anything, Bagley, for anything I shall await these revelations."

V.

*Being the first of the brown-paper
communications from
Bagley.*

*Setting forth the
miseries of unre-
quited love.* mastor van — i inclos one
of them bloody pappers
whitch mastor jak throws into the was-
papper baskit i am word to deth about
poor mastor jak sir i am he is paking Up
his trunk sir sas he is goin over th oshen
& he wonts me to go long i dont wunt to
go but i Will go for the good lord only
nose whot will becum of poor jak donalds
if i lets him go alone sir god bless You
sir i am werry Mutch donharted i think
of my wif & childern two of them i got

to once sir lord keep em heaven only nose
ware they Wud go to if in one of them
tantrums mastor jak shud cut my trote
good By

phil Bagley—

p. s. i wish you wud call on mastor jak &
if he Wunt let You in bust don the dore

VI.

Being a fragment of the enclosure.

1. 在 1990 年 12 月 1 日以前，
 2. 在 1990 年 12 月 1 日以前，
 3. 在 1990 年 12 月 1 日以前，
 4. 在 1990 年 12 月 1 日以前，
 5. 在 1990 年 12 月 1 日以前，
 6. 在 1990 年 12 月 1 日以前，
 7. 在 1990 年 12 月 1 日以前，
 8. 在 1990 年 12 月 1 日以前，
 9. 在 1990 年 12 月 1 日以前，
 10. 在 1990 年 12 月 1 日以前，

VII.

Being a communication from Van dispatched to probe the Donalds mansion.

In which Van's solitude and outraged pride find somewhat of relief.

My dear Jack :— I have called at your walled-up solitude several times since you left me in such ungallant haste the other night, and each time, been utterly denied admittance to your laboratory. Now this is to politely inform you that in my belief, you are making one of the great mistakes of your life thus to throw over the ballast of a friend such as I have ever proven to you, Jack, to lighten this mysterious balloon business of yours. I half grant you pardon before you ask it, in the assurance that you are a sick man ; for no one but a man suffering from some inexplicable nervous illness could change so in a few weeks. Now, my sorely delinquent Pylades, after all the over-mutual confidences and oaths of friendship eternal that have sobered down our lives in each other's circle, I have a right to know the cause of this breach of faith,—

this lack-confidence so ill-becoming you, and entreat, by all the treasured mutualities of the past, that ere it be too late and the door of my house and heart be closed to you, you speedily unveil these mysterious skeletons and stand before me a whole being again, — something more than a morbid semblance of the Jack Donalds I once knew — stand before me disclosed and forgiven. Forget not the honor of a friend's implied oath. If it be adversity that separates us, let it be like the adversity of the past that has only strengthened us. Let me share your anxiety and sorrow, if such be the cause of this separation, and I shall be happy in them, since anything rather than this cold, suspense, becoming not us, dear Jack, is far worthier us, and more devoutly to be sought.

God bless you !

Van.

*A telegraphic communication from
Jack Donalds.*

Mr. Van——

*Washington Square,
New York.*

*Eureka cypher found dondolo exonerated
confiscation tortious estate recoverable thank god
sail umbria good bye.*

JACK DONALDS.

IX.

A second brown-paper communication from Bagley.

lord bles us sir go to stemer umbry be-
fore to oclock an hed of master jak he is
gone stark mad i wunt go with him so he
give me a cut over the i do somethin im-
ejutly plese i pray god my heart is brok

Phil Bagley

master jak burnt yur leter up & he did
not even reed it

X.

*On deck Steamship Umbria a few minutes
before sailing. Confusion reigning.*

*In which Van en-
counters his fa-
natical enthusiast
on the verge of de-
parture.*

"Hello! Van—why, hum!
—you here?"

"Yes, Jack, I *am* here.

Take a good look at me and satisfy your-
self that I am no ghost. I am here, and
let me tell you plainly, in one of the
vilest moods that any man's disregard for
my wishes and opinions ever sunk me.
Now, Jack Donalds, you have treated
me like a dog; you have just twelve
minutes to make your apologies in, right
here, — right here on deck!"

"Why, my dear fellow —"

"This is no 'dear fellow' business I
am on, sir. I come not with a metheglin
speech and flowers to say 'good bye' to
my Sir Pertinax; I come with a sword
and I intend to use it.... Jack, why did
you burn my letter without even open-
ing it?"

"Why, Van, — eh, my dear fel — I say,
why do you talk that rag'muffin bravado

right here on deck? Come, let's go below."

"No ; we have n't time, Jack."

"Then follow me up forward the fore-castle. Do n't let the whole world into our squabbles ! . . . Now, old fellow, here you are ; be calm. This is all a surprise — a most amazing surprise to me --"

"What think you, then, the quality of my amazement at your conduct?"

"Ah ! but I had no idea I was doing any wrong, Van ; 'pon my heart, I did n't. That letter — oh, why . . . who told you I burned it?"

"Never mind ; I asked *why*?"

"Impulse, Van, a pure, simple, devil's contagion, — a violent, unconquerable something that has mastered me and made a desperate man of me ever since you gave me that second volume of Ariosto. I really think it has turned the whole world swimming *in dietro* to my eyes. Why, my poor man Bagley shrinks from me ; and so seems everything and everybody, Van, but you, my brave fellow, you have a soldier's heart ; you will not fear any of these changeful vagaries of mine — you will stand at my side,

Come now, old fellow, we are about to part ; I could not now tell you why, Van, only I must go to Venice. Hear it ! that's the bell — you have only three minutes. Let's not quarrel, my man ! . . . Take my hand . . . God ! What have I not suffered in the last few weeks ? Look at me ! I am simply a wreck of my former self — an anomaly — a satire. All my spirit, warmth of aspiration and gaiety seem to have sunken far beyond my grasp — seem to have been sucked from my vitals by that horrible leech — that — that death-smelling pergamena ! No, no ; do n't shrink from me, Van : you of all the world should be brave when even I am a coward proven ; you should extenuate my failings in your heart where now you impute them to a most gross waving of duty ! ”

“ Did you strike Bagley this morning, Jack ? ”

“ Yes ; to my shame and crimination, I did strike Bagley a blow on the forehead ; and, Van, I would cover that little wound with gold a foot deep if that would heal it into forgetfulness. But the real wound is beyond the reach of such stuff, and

now the last thread that binds him faithful to me, is broken. I insulted him and thought that he insulted me in proper return. On the strength of the misunderstanding, I struck him ; I never was so sorry for a deed of cowardice in my life."

"Well, there is Bagley, see !—down there in the crowd on the dock. You have a chance to show your manliness now, Jack, by apologizing to him here before me. You need not shrink that way ; if I gave a dog a dishonorable blow, I should not consider it an improper lowering of my pride to make just amends Bagley ! Bagley ! I say — you 're wanted up here instantly ; do n't lose a second Here he comes. Now, Jack there is no use trying to be angry with you long ; I cannot do it, and never could. Just as I resolve upon my heart to give you your solid due in a proper castigation of curses, you conquer me with a single look — with a single amenity of speech that plagues me back into my old forgiving mood again. Now, say, quickly, Jack, confess briefly : what in the name of the Mysteries are you going to Venice

for ? — may I not be enlightened ? ”

“ What for ? Why, Van, you don’t intimate that you are ignorant of — ”

“ Ignorant of everything, my dear fellow, ignorant of my very existence when you are at hand with some of your incongruities of deed and word. Come.”

“ Why, I have discovered the cryptographic cypher of Dondolo on that piece of human parchment. I am going to Venice to prove it ! ”

“ Prove what, Jack ? — going to prove what ? Do n’t you know you are talking the most abstract nonsense ? ”

“ And do you mean to say, Van, that after all I have not made evident everything to you ? ”

“ How have you ? Do you mistake me for a mind-solver — a sort of psychological apprehender of your abstractions by merely staring you in the eyes ? You have barred me from your precious secret, Jack, whatever it prove — a madman’s vagary, or a saint’s inspiration — yes, barred your best and worthiest friend from it as if it were too sacred to stand within my grasp of reason, and I might profane it by an honest scrutiny. Have

you just discovered my ignorance?"

"Truly enough, dear Van, truly enough But oh, *misericordia*! how — where — when shall I begin? How shall I dare venture upon so infinitely difficult a task?"

"Hi — Bagley! — here you are, good fellow, here you are, thank heaven! Master Jack has a word or two with you. Why do you hang back so? here — up here! Jove! there is the last bell. Good bye, Jack; now look here. Make me two promises upon your life, upon your life, Jack Donalds, — mind me now, I am dead in earnest — make me two solemn promises."

"Anything, Van, anything under heaven, so long as you will befriend me even in my weakness. What may they be?"

"First, that you will not leave this steamer, Jack Donalds, without having written at full length, signed, sealed and delivered to the ship's post at Queens-town, an accurate, straightforward confession of every detail of this housed-up mystery. Not to withhold a solitary fact — not a single measure of the truth barred from me longer. Second, to take Bagley

to Venice and keep him with you."

"But, sir, h'I do n't wants to go, sir, h'I do n't!"

"Yes you do ; you do n't know what you do want, Bagley—Master Jack has a word or two of private reconciliation—that is, he—eh—he wants to shake you by the hand again, Bagley—"

"But, Van, I can't afford to take Bagley—"

"Then I can. Here, Bagley, here's my purse and plenty in it. In London or Paris draw on me for more if needed . . . See here, Bagley, come one side with me. Say ; do n't you know Master Jack is a sick man?"

"God bless us h'all, sir, h'I do n't know wot to think these 'orrible tumble-down times, sir."

"Well, he's a sick man, and you must take care of him. In case of trouble, cable me—that is, take your message to the United States Consul and tell him it must be sent to me by cable—see?"

"Damme, h'I thinks maybe I do, sir, but h'I 'ardly knows for sure, sir."

"There goes the bell again! Good bye, Jack, my boy, keep your promise—"

"Van, you simply amaze me!"

"Do I? — well, you have eight days of sea-voyage in which to get over it. Now look you, Jack Donalds; keep your oath to me. If you do n't — Jack, if you don't keep your promises, I'll haunt you like a fiend. I'll dog your steps to the end of your days."

"Do n't say that, dear Van. Do n't say that."

"Jack, I have done my duty by you — done it faithfully, conscientiously always: do you the same to me, and — and God bless you! Good bye...."

XI.

*Being a communication which reaches Van
at the Athenæum, and causes him
to hasten home to his task.*

*In which Jack Don-
alds grows repent-
ant and somewhat
contemplative.*

STEAMSHIP UMBRIA.—*Mid-ocean.* My dear, good comrade, Van : I have certainly borne up under much misery of mind ever since our parting on Tuesday, much despondent and bitter reverting to the past having seized me, and much melancholy sown broadcast over these violent waves ; but still, ah, still this wound upon my heart, Van, — this aching gap left by your poignant words, heals not, and perhaps it is because the scourge was so deservedly inflicted. When I think it all over, Van, you dear, kingly-hearted old Spartan — ah, I half believe those warm honest eyes are upon me now — when I give the humor of the moment fullest league and limit, I see how wrong, how brutally wrong I was from the very first too keep my secret from you. I knew

when you called both times, dear fellow, I knew it, but I dared not let you see in what a deplorable condition of mind I was, Van, I knew not why, — I simply dared not, that is all. There now, my honest Brutus let me take your good warm hand, and say Cassius-like from the depths of my poor heart, —

“ Have you not love enough to bear with me
When that rash humor which my mother gave me
Makes me forgetful ? ”

then let these lashing, prophetic old waves answer back :

“ Yes, Cassius, and from henceforth
When you are over-earnest with your Brutus,
He'll think your mother chides and leaves you so ! ”

I thought to spare you at first, yes, only thought to spare you ; for you have so impressible and sensitive a heart with all its Tuscan ruggedness, and shrink so from the influence of this parchment mystery which is in truth the whole secret of the breach between us, and then this resolve gave way to reluctance, and finally ended in a stoical abandonment of my brave project, and you are — stop ! do n't look at me that way, Van — God ! how real was that strange, strange image

that, just as I lifted my eyes and stared out over the tameless sea, came out of the fretful deep and stood black, seething and cruel on the crest of a single wave — your own hot feature that even the sea-fiends seemed to have learned by heart, to ape, cast back into my eyes and tantalize me. Ah, little thought I that your generous gift on that memorable night would prove so disastrous a wedge between such friends as the warm, blessed years have proven us, but let us be careful — oh, so watchfully guarding, lest the chasm widen and these twin spirits that were born and nurtured up into man's estate each for the other's sweet weal, be severed and shattered forever.

These are my quieter moments, Van, moments dropt from heaven, all radiance, all benediction. And at ease here on deck at twilight as I drop my poor aching temples to the pillow and the good ship rocks me to quietness, now giving my eyes a glimpse of the solemn sea and now rolling back that my thoughts lie in the bosom of the clouds and I watch the laughing stars peep out bolder from under the hem of the purple twilight, it

seems as if all the world must love you, because I love you. I write this with spontaneous hand, not daring to drop my eyes and behold what I have written, lest the tenderness of these thoughts bring the blush to the cheek of the strong man; but they are nearest my heart and must remain.

I can realize and contemplate with honest reverence every deed that has dropt into the balance from my impulses. It is only when fevered by long, exciting study over this parchment mystery that I am no longer a philosopher and a sane man, doing unattributable things I am sorry for the moment after the doing, and by this fierce fire-light robbed of my soberer element, and made untrue to all the past has proven me. So now that I approach you in calmness, realize my better heart. . . . Bagley grows a little more communicative by my renewed pettings and my officious soothings of his exaggerated wounds; but do you know, when you left us standing there alone forward the fore-castle, and he saw you disappearedown the deck, he turned and looked at me in such a helpless, abandoned sort of way, that I

had half the heart to let him go. He sprang to the side of the deck, and I believe he would have jumped overboard to have escape me had I not most quietly constrained him, and soothed back those wrinkles with a little honey of entreatment which he is so unused to that it acts as a narcotic instantly. But this is neither here nor there ; to the point ! It seems as if I had not the courage to fill this page with a confession of the whole truth that has steeped my days and deeds of late in so impenetrable a labyrinth, but should I die, there would remain no other record than this, and for the sake of those dear to you in such an event, as well as for your own satisfaction which I know is not prompted of an idly curious desire to pry my lips apart, I will unbosom to you.

That pergamena, as I before assured you, though without the certain proof that settled the conjecture in my mind, is human parchment, taken as I have further proven, from the heaviest part of the leg. By a careful and studied microscopic examination I was convinced of these facts, but was puzzled by certain minute spots

in this pergamena which must have been little wounds upon the live flesh,— little poison needle-pricks perhaps, that had left a slight discoloration ; but to my surprise and assurance, on holding the parchment before a very strong light in a dark room, the little wounds seemed to extend clear through, many having so open a puncture that the light penetrated them.

By a studied chemical process I found that the pricks were poisoned in order to keep the wounds from healing. There were long, mysterious lines of them in such studied precision that I was seized with the conviction that they contained a cryptographic cypher. These minute punctures I copied accurately and studied out the key. I found that it was a confession of Marco, son of Doge Dondolo, pricked into his flesh probably while awaiting the summons the Council of Three and the inevitable death-penalty. It was virtually the revealment of the whole truth of the conspiracy in which Dondolo, it was accused, was implicated. It exonerates him in full, and proves that the confiscated estate of the House of Dondolo, half of which went to the ac-

cursor and half to the state, was an unlawful seizure, and I, being the only lineal representative of Marco Dondolo, am going to Venice, and shall engage the best Italian counsel to make a dash of reprisal by following up this clew and gaining to the rightful heir the vast estate which now lies in their hands. There is only one line in the whole confession that baffles me ; but I hope by a clearer, renewed effort, to gain the point ere long. If I do not, I shall say nothing about it. That which precedes it and that which comes after it, is all that is necessary ; if favorable, it could avail little ; and if unfavorable, it would only render my task more embittering. The cryptograph is in Italian, and much abbreviated. In this one line the wounds must have almost healed upon the living flesh, for they are very incomplete. The task is to supply these missing microscopic dots. The confession is in four parts, — *Primo*, *Secondo*, *Terzo*, *Quarto* ; it is this *Quarto* that baffles me.

Now, my dear fellow-craftsman, this is calmly, scientifically, generously confessed. It is the whole truth and nothing

but the truth, God bless you ; do not mistake any of my doings. I shall write you often and post you as to my progress. That *Quarto* gives me many sleepless nights. I fear there is something in the one line that will surprise and overthrow me. Still, why am I turned sceptic amid all this which has so proven belief?—what is there possible to be said that could overthrow all that precedes and follows?....My hand trembles and I must stop!....

XII.

*A communication from Bagley written
on the edge of a newspaper.*

In which the equanimity of this personage is regained and sustained.

SIR — master jack Is mutch improved sence you giv him that blody takinto on the stemer dek the day You & us parted i am verry glad sir that you purswadid me to go with him

sir i Am & i feal verry sorry that i sed as
i did say as mite be missunderstude by
enyon but you who nose him so well &
me to god bles your hart sir i am so bloody
hapy in thinkin of my wif & childern
whitch i shal soon see god save them all
you know thos cordyroi trossers you giv
me are al out in the seat sir & i have to
put sum stons in my cotale pokets to
keap my red flanils from shoin when the
wind bloos heven be thanked ther is no
bulls on bord i shal tell my wif how good
you be i dont no wot she wil say wen she
sees my hul ten tose stikin out of my
stokins whitch luk like as they wer mits
i shal rite oftin abot master jak sir he taks
to hissef a grate deel yet in fak sir i think
as mutch as ever he did only perhaps not
so bloody loud as he did afore good bi

your everlasten frend

phil Bagley

p s—master jak got a takin to the oshen
las nite & wen i woke up he had his hed
thru the porthole & cudnt get it bak agin
so i told him if he didnt shuttup his
dom taking to hissef & keping the nabers
awak i wud let him stay ther war he wus
so he promist an i got his bloody hed out of

the port hole agin and he shuttup i wish
 you cud git into my close trunk & send
 me a cleen shirt for godsake

p B

XIII.

A note of gratulation and admonishment to Bagley.

*In which Van lets
 slip a fatal inadvertence.*

DEAR BAGLEY :—You were
 very good and deserve
 much credit for your promptness and
 straight-forward posting me as to your
 Master Jack's capers. You will be in
 Venice long ere this reaches England, so
 I will mail direct to Venice in care of
 the Cafè Florian, and as I also shall all
 letters to Master Jack. Be a good, kind
 friend to Donalds, a clever watch over his
 ways that he fall into no mischief, and
 write me every day or two regarding his
 actions. Give the enclosed letter to him.
 It is of much importance concerning that

sheet of paper you gave me, and must be delivered to him immediately. Burn this, Bagley, and do n't let Jack think by any of your ways that you believe him insane, even if he does things that are very strange. Stand by him in everything. Burn this, I repeat...."

XIV.

Enclosed communication to Jack Donalds.

*Wherein Van gives
way to the secret
of his researches.*

DEAR JACK : Your letter simply amazed me. I can but thank you for the honest epistle, but regret that you did not have the courage to let me into your secret by the front door while you were with me, instead of this oblique manner which ill becomes the mutual duty. You certainly made a great mistake, Jack, in the wedding an ocean between us like this, and, too, at the very hour when of all times, I flatter myself

you need my counsel and balancing quality, if you please.

But, dear fellow, let the captious hawk chatter away by himself while I proceed to more serious business. I too have a confession, Jack, one of the abject, crawling kind, in a way, and yet of a certain triumphant order that will redeem the reprobation of the deed. I called upon you; you denied me: naturally enough the outraged quality by which we recognize the honor of a friend, was aroused to a new, a poignant, prying sense, perhaps half unnatural curiosity and half natural demand. I pried Bagley open as easily as an oyster, and he developed into something inspired in the way of a second hand Northumberland Ariel. He told me all he knew, — little enough indeed — which only heightened the measure of my marvelling and cupidity to gain and retain the point. At my dictation, this Bagley rescued one of your scrawling Asian mysteries from the waste-paper basket — one of the copies of the pergamena cryptograph, — and by the aid of your labyrinthine notes which soon become intelligible to me, and by the

fierce light of a desire to know and out-wit you perhaps at your own profession, I spent days and nights over it, and am pleased to say that I am now well progressed. The *Primo*, *Terzo* and *Quarto* I deciphered with perfect ease, but the *Secondo* baffles me. In the *Quarto* I was obliged to supply much that appeared to be missing, and thus found the affair easy enough. I am surprised that you could have so mistaken the facts. Oh, Jack Donalds, if you had discovered the wonderful secret of that *Quarto*, you would never have left these shores. That *Quarto* defeats — kills your project. I shall not humor you by making it plain here on paper that may possibly reach profane eyes, so, if you really want to know my version — the true, vital version of the fourth confession of Marco Dondolo, you must either come to me, or in becoming humbleness, beckon me over to companion you in this project as in all others of the past. You need not implore me to commit it to paper ; it shall not be done.

Be good to poor Bagley ; this is a solemn sacrifice for him, displaying a most generously sympathetic and affec-

tionate quality. Remember, he could leave at any moment and get better pay, and, yes, — let me reproach you just a little sternly — better treatment than is blest him in the valetship of Jack Donalds.

All's well ; write often.

God bless you !

Van.

XV.

A hasty scrawl from Bagley at Venice.

*Which causes alarm
in the household on
Washington Square.*

SIR.—ther is tunder to pa i dont no wot to do now for mastor jak Got yur leter adrest to me and heavenelpus wot you think he don he opened & red the one for me & thru it in the fire along with the other one whitch i expose was for him tho i dont no he did not reed the one for him and sed damim when the flams tuk hold

on yur leter he is rasin cane agen al over town & abusis me lik a bloody ox he dus i wish i hed never cum over hear with him but stade ther wer i was he Fel from one of them gondolys las nite & one of them gondolyman saved his lif & then he pumbled the gondolyman for doin it for god-sak com over direkly sir or jak donals wil kil hissef and the hole tone to i think there mus be somthin bustid enside of him i do las nite he tuk me by the trote an choked me til i saw every thin red an green lik an ast me if i Thout he was In-sain i told him good god no so he let me of with only a blak i if i had sed yes i Wud be plain a harp & singen hims this mornen he has al my monny & i cant get away or i wud for hevensak do somthen about this quik or phil Bagley is a ded man....

XVI,

*A plaintive appeal from the Vice
Consul of Venice.*

*Which culminates a
resolve in the heart
of Van.*

MY DEAR VAN.—I write you in a state of perplexity such as I rarely experience. Remembering you with such heartfelt promptings of friendship, and feeling assured that you would do me a most earnest and important favor, I beg to make known to you a few facts relevant to a mysterious affair, which, fearing you are not acquainted in the remotest detail, I will make as plain as such inexplicable matters may be at my inefficient hands, and shall ask you to corroborate those facts with which you are conversant, as well as answer a few of my hopeful and solicitious queries.

There is an American here — one Jack Donalds — a very strange and unfathomable character, and with whom, I am told, you are acquainted — that has literally set the city in a most staggering fer-

ment. He proves, and most plausibly too, let me assure you at the outset, that he is a lineal descendant of the good Doge Dondolo. His papers and records, meagre as they are, have here a full substantiation in the chronicles of the Archive, and for this much, all is correct, not wanting a single line or bridge to complete the downward highway of evidences from that day to this. If Dondolo's son Marco had not died a prisoner — executed I believe upon decree of the dread Council of Three — and his estate, vast as it was, confiscated by the state and divided with his informer, this man Donalds would be to-day the sole possessor of the Dondolo estate, which, I am told by reputable authorities, is worth some twenty million lire. Now comes the mysterious argument. In the family chronicles of the informer, Selini by name, — records now in the possession of Signorina Maria, a young girl lately left an orphan, and the last representative of the illustrious House of Selini, — there is an account of a drunken revel over the body of Marco Donoldo, the executed conspirator, and the barbarous confession

of having taken from the body of the dead criminal a portion of the skin, which, horrible sacrilege as it seems even in these superstitious days, was passed over to a legatura who bound an old Greek testament with it. This hideous relic came down in the family with its disgusting secret now almost become a legend ; but the mother of the present sole survivor, some years before she died, was afflicted with so painful an aversion to the thing, that she broke the seal of the chest wherein it was kept, violated the injunction of her ancestor who charged that it should never pass from the possession of the House of Selini, and bore the mysterious treasure away, giving it, as it proves, to an old second-hand book dealer, in exchange for some more modern and less horrifying a nightmare. Record beyond this is lost completely till it turns up here in the full blaze of latter-day thirst for antiquated mystery, having exchanged its biblical enclosure which it had disgraced so many years, for the second volume of an old and valuable series of Ariosto. The legatura here recognized his handiwork instantly

and remembers having bound it for *you*. Donalds affirms that you gave him the volume, feeling assured that there hung about it some benightmared ghostry, yet not knowing the truth of its historical values. Now comes the inexplicable part which to all the world seems plain enough without further substantiation, but still I hope for something from you by way of corroboration. This gaunt figured Donalds has called all the wise heads of Venice together, from the Prefect to the custom expert at the Dogana, proven his origin by a logical enough train of reason, shown them the parchment which he has torn from the volume, and demonstrated from certain signs upon its surface, the fact that Selim was the traitor, and not Marco Dondolo who is the herein exonerated, and that Dondolo was wrongfully convicted and executed, his estate being confiscated and divided with the informer. Donalds demands, and, let me say, sir, it looks as if his plausible demand would receive universal approval, strange as is its train of logic, the return to the rightful heir of the Dondolo family, *i. e.*, to himself, the

whole confiscation. This is serious business for the state ; but, let me add, far more serious to this one survivor of the House of Selini, and means nothing short of the disgrace and poverty of an innocent young woman who now stands the honored and beloved of all admiring eyes. Donalds has procured the ablest counsel in Italy, on shares I believe, and they undertake the whole prosecution, which they have ventured upon in solemn good earnest. Now let me further confess, if I do not already weary you with what is to me a vitally interesting affair, this man Donalds, in my candid estimation, is somewhat insane. He has done and is daily doing the most unaccountably strange things, carrying out the whims and aberrations of a madman with the prodigal power of a foreigner in a land of foreigner-worship.

In the matter against the Selini estate and the state of Venice, he has a clear enough claim ; but for a week or two has ceased pressing the matter, as if secretly satisfied in being recognized an apt solver of a most astounding enigma. Indeed since his meeting with this fair re-

presentative of the famous House of Selini, he has abruptly curtailed all proceedings, halting the lawyers in their bombardment of the city's treasury, and in her presence as well as out of it, acts the most staggering role. To be disburdened of my candid conjecture—which conjecture is not without a certain positive heralding of the truth—Mr. Donalds is in love with the amiable Signorina whose possessions it now becomes his necessity to besiege, and stricken with a realizing sense of her dependence upon this one prop he is about to snatch from her, he shrinks from the pursuance of the project that would surely leave her in disgrace and penury. The city, in the meantime, writhes as in a fever of wonder and prying curiosity, and Donalds' strange manœuvres are exaggerated to the utmost. Let me know any facts which may throw the slightest glimmer upon the mysterious case, and I shall reward you with a current chronicle of proceedings at the other end of the line.

As ever cordially,

J. J. JACKSON.

Donalds has a valet with him, Bagley

by name, who seems to be losing flesh and conscience in the eager suspense. He pleads with me to beseech you for funds that he may forswear his master and return home. While I am truly sorry Donalds gives him such solicitude, I really think Bagley ought to be persuaded to stay with his master, or some one who has more influence over Donalds,—I mean of a physical rather than a psychical kind, for that man Donalds strikes straight from the shoulder—he found to companion him in a way, till he recovers his senses somewhat.

J. J. J.

Cablegram.

U. S. VICE-CONSUL, VENICE.

Feel that case is urgent sail to-day via Havre inform Bagley but not Donalds.

VAN.

XVII.

A curt communication from Bagley.

*Which intercepts
Van at the Hotel
d'Louvre, Paris, ten
days later.*

god bless your sole master
van the vice consil received
your cabil mesage saing you was coming
i rite you this in grate hast for my hart is
way up in my trote with joy sir and send
it to paris to hed you of dont wate a mint
on the way but hurry along for master jak
is on one of them old tanterum fits agen
an i am wel ni ded

ons mor god bles your sole.

phil Bagley

Telegram.

U. S. VICE-CONSUL, VENICE.

*Leave Turin this morning meet me nine
thirty if possible.*

VAN.

XVIII.

*Venice. Van and his friend of old, the
Vice Consul, hand-clasped at ease
in the gondola.*

*Mr. Jackson now
renders unto Cæsar
the things which are
Cæsar's.*

"VAN, my good friend,
I am overjoyed to see you
again, though my delight is scarcely
heightened in its humor by the inaus-
picious developments in this strange
friend of yours.... Vittorio, by the Rial-
to directly to the *Piazza!*"

*"Va bene, Signore. Stali! stali! — ecco
me!"*

"I thought, Mr. Jackson, that I might
be intercepted at Paris by a letter from
you, but I only received one of poor Bag-
ley's brown-paper nightmares, all spas-
modic God-bless-yous, fright, cursings,
and no news. I hoped a missive from
you might put my anxieties at ease."

"Ah well, I thought many times of
writing, but was deterred by these ardu-
ous consular cares as of old, you know,
which duties have been much aggravated,

as you may imagine by the wavering uncertainty of this Donalds' case."

"Anything new of late?"

"New?—well it's all new enough. It's like a mummy of one of the Ptolemies dragged from its tomb and set up for popular awe with the tomb-damps still clinging about it. It is new of course, but dreadfully old at the same time."

"What then is the latest?"

"Ah, Van, do n't ask me yet. Let's not run up this chain backwards. Let us begin at the first—coddle and analyze these earlier leakages of the cup that intoxicates us all, and test them with our proper alchemies."

"What think you of the whole affair, Mr. Jackson?"

"Think of it—what do I think of it?—well, I hardly know how to answer you. It is one of the most inscrutable, indecipherable mazes that ever has been my misfortune to become inveigled into, for I must confess, my abject curiosity which has led me into mischief before this, has now sunken me beneath the weight of a sort of *crux criticorum*, yes, and *asinorum* too, till I am destined to

wrangle Donalds free, or go down with him. As for the pergamena, it simply out-sphinxes the sphinx!"

"And how has he behaved of late?"

"Worse and worse, I am pained to confess; more despondent and consequently desperate; more love-stricken and hence more irritable; more certain of success which he now shrinks to embrace, hence the madder. You know he nearly killed poor Bagley!"

"Heavens!—what?"

"Yes; he cut Bagley with a stiletto very badly. It's an ugly wound, but Bagley is as true as steel, though, naturally enough, he is afraid of his employer. Yes; Bagley is as faithful a martyr to an insane vagarist as only a very brave man could be. He appeals to me almost hourly for news from you, and beseeches me to use all modern engineering in his poor, martyred behalf. He came to me the other day with one of his brown-paper harangues, said the post would not carry it to you quickly enough, and wanted me to cable it. I pacified him with half a promise sandwiched between my suppressed smiles, and laid the huge chron-

icle of grievances in the pigeon-hole. It would have cost a fortune to cable and probably have torn the cable all to pieces with its chivalrous English and knock-kneed orthography. I shall deliver it to you in person."

"Was he badly hurt then?"

"It might have proven a more serious wound; and, if Bagley had not sworn in exoneration of his master, you might have had the pleasure of greeting Jack on the *Riva* in that imposing edifice with bars at the windows."

"Not at all a delightful thought to contemplate, Mr. Jackson."

"But that has all passed and proven Bagley every inch a philosopher, and half a saint. He affirms, however, that there is but one man that can handle Donalds and curb those spasms of tremendous rage which recur too often for public and private good. I trust, upon heart, I trust this is so."

"Well, we have been friends from boyhood, Jack and I, but these changes—bless my stars, Mr. Jackson, they bewilder me. Why, sir, he used to be one of the most docile, innocent, jovial-hearted fellows—

why, I can't be persuaded that this is Jack Donalds dragging me over here to help him out of this madman's mischief."

"And has n't he always been like this, Van?"

"Like this?—no. I never dreamt there was a latent spark in his whole nature that could be fanned into so savage a conflagration as threatens to make fools of himself and all his friends. He used to be so opened-souled, fathomable, free, don't you see, so opposite me in my ungenial unapproachableness to any but old-time friends, so full of that God-blessed quality that construes our commonplace days to things worth living for after all. Well, he has been ever disposed to lavish his charities upon others: I certainly am willingly disposed to be prodigal of that same in return."

"That's best, Van, after all. And is it true that you gave him this parchment volume?"

"Yes, to my sorrow I confess it, though I have wished a thousand times it were in ashes where I have often more than half resolved to immolate it at the altars of the fiends. He has told you nothing that

concerns me in the mysterious matter that I cannot verify to the utmost. He seemed much fascinated by the thing, and I, while his infatuation increased, nursed my aversion the more. He begged to 'borrow the loan of it,' as Bagley says, and I, bless my soul, I was only so glad to see the thing safely from under my peaceful, heart's-easing roof. Since that very night, he has been a changed man. God keep the boy, I trust nothing really serious will be the outcome of all this, but I truly wish that death-smelling pergamena Ariosto was well sunken in its proper limbo!—"

"Death-smelling, say you?—Ah, that's the word precisely."

"Then you saw it?"

"Yes; when Donalds pleaded his cause so admirably before the Prefect and the state officials some weeks ago, and again I saw it in his little study in the Palazzo Contarini. It's a most astonishing thing!"

"But—begging your pardon for growing over-confidential, Mr. Jackson—can he read it all?"

"All?—all what? What do you mean

by that, pray, Van, my dear fellow ? ”

“ Why, all this parchment chronicle, — this steganography of Marco Dondolo ? — is it all obvious and intelligible to him and the world ? ”

“ Why, I suppose so, — it must be, since it is plain enough to base such astounding procedures upon. It’s this way, Van : it’s divided into three parts ; *il Primo, Secondo, e Terzo* — ”

“ And — ”

“ Well, and what, Van ? — what else ? ”

“ . . . And *Quarto*, my dear sir, there is a *Quarto* yet unsolved ! Do n’t you know that ? ”

“ You astound me. I thought it was all plain to him.”

“ Ah, and *that* contains the secret that overthrows it all ! Silence ! — calm yourself, Mr. Jackson. That *Quarto* is to me an open, solved enigma. I alone have pried the secret, and if I chose, I could use it as a lever to the Devil’s vantage. But keep my secret. The greatest revelation of all that death-smelling oracle Jack Donalds has yet to learn ! ”

“ You amaze me most profoundly but here we are at the Piazzetta. Let us

go directly to the Cafè Florian and intercept him !”

“No, no ; not yet, Mr. Jackson. Let us go to the Consulate first, and make our plans for the future.”

“Ah, Van, you are the same level-headed old diplomat, I see !”

XIX.

Donald's apartments in the Contarini. Van at the window smoking listlessly. Jack outstretched on the rugs beyond. Room in the maddest confusion, heaped with rubbish and curios of all imaginable kinds.

Wherein Jack's eyes are opened a little wider.

“BLESS you, my boy, that is just the reason and none other, that I came to your rescue. I have been well posted on these matters, and know your pranks to the utmost detail, Jack, and I have come not to join in an awing, gaping, marvelling mob to prod

you on and marvel the more, but to bring peace and quiet, Jack, and I mean to stay. Bagley has been most shamefully treated at your hands, and I am astonished that you should break your oath which I hoped truly would last this long."

"How broke I my oath, Van? tell me —"

"By treating Bagley as if he were a Siberian exile and you his relentless *custos*. Ah, Jack, you are a dogged mystery to us all. I am rather inclined to the mysterious myself, but to nothing of your slavish order; just as I like animals, but monstrosities, bah!... Now, my strange fellow of yore, I am with you and intend staying. You might as well calm yourself, rein yourself down to your natural meridian, and so stand disclosed to me. I prefer your stony secrets to flow their virtue spontaneously, voluntarily to the stroke of my rod —"

"And suppose they do n't flow — then what?"

"If they do not, remember that this very rod that plays the prophet, can play the tyrant — the chaplet, a scourge."

"Indeed? That's almost a threat—"

"Yes, indeed, Jack Donalds, I intend to see this thing through, and, if there is any rhyme or reason of ever so gossamer a consistency in your prosecution of the case, I am willingly up in arms to do you honor. Now for a few questions. Mind you answer me truthfully and without evasion, for they will have ample opportunity to disgrace, or verify and honor themselves."

"But, Van, I might as well inform you at the outset that I shall pursue the matter no further, — at least not for some months yet."

"Why then have you engaged counsel, the ablest in the country I am told, to further your claims? You shall be successful if the merest shadow proves propitious. Lawyers work best in shadows, you know."

"Yes, I know they do, Van, but I'm afraid there is n't shadow enough —"

"Shadow enough?—why, there is shadow enough here to make a minature Egyptian night — a palpable young Erebus —"

"You trifle, Van; this is a desperate

reality to me. To confess the truth, I have a great favor to ask you, my boy ; can you grant me one after all the whips of scorn I have inflicted ?”

“That you confess them exacts ready forgiveness of me, and half insures your wish. What may be this vital favor, Jack ?”

“That you will lend me ten thousand dollars.”

“ . . . Well, go on ; anything else ?”

“Do n't play with me. I am sparring for something I hold very dear, yes, for my life, if I must make brazen and confess it you, and my beseechings are the result of a most burdening compunction, long hesitancy, and somehow a feeling that I shall not be refused. Come, Van, can you do this for me ?”

“With all my heart if thereby you are bettered in body or spirit. What, pray, would you do with so much ready money ?”

“Pay these whelping lawyers !”

“What ?—with the case only half accomplished ?”

“Verily. I want to bribe them to relinquish the affair in its entirety. I

want them to drop it right here ! ”

“ Nonsense, man, you amaze me. Your madness has taken a reversal violence all of a sudden. You must make plainer to me, Jack, than these weird blinkings and shrugs, these sighs and scoutings. Come, you are a desperate man ; to the point ! — why ? ”

“ Why, Van ? How can you lay bare such a wounding query, — strike me with so two-edged and solemn a question when the truth is answerable in my very presence ? You are no common touch-stone of human character, Van, or you could read it plainly enough.”

“ Indeed ? I always flattered myself into the conviction that I at least read you, Jack, right to the heart ! ”

“ Not to the heart, Van, not to the heart. Come, now ; you have been here two days ; you have partaken of the popular pabulum — the gossip’s toast to their fated amuser, you have heard my name upon profane lips, and another name coupled with mine — a name sweet as the kiss of daybreak to the unshackled captive, for it seems, dear Van, as if I had served a thousand years of slavery,

and in this one benignant breath uttering that same name to heaven, I am a freeman again ! Ah, you smile, my brave, still sceptic comrade, smile and are reluctant to my beseeching eyes, but the end is here, — the end of the beginning ; for this prosecution of one truly innocent of any iniquitous thought or desire shall be relinquished ; it must end here. Mine is a new and a renewed manhood, standing one and apart, yet not companionless in this godlike solitude."

" You talk like a lover, Jack !—"

" I talk like a lover ?— yes, Van, I *do* talk like a lover, and I think like a lover, and I pray, and I hope, and weep, and joy, and kiss a dying faith, and drink the lees of desperation like a lover, yes, and love — I *love* like a lover. Look at me, my good friend ; here have we been parted for many long months. I came with an ambition to a cause which I dare not pursue. I came to conquer ; but here am conquered. I came to rail back a whole army of stronger, better men than I, and did it, only to be conquered in turn by a soft uppoised hand, a pair of Italian eyes that stand like tearful remonstrances

of heaven charging me to silence, a red, quivering lip that speaks oracles no philosopher nor saint dare gainsay, Van, my good friend,—conquered by a woman with a weapon of a single look, a single breath, a single touch that convinces me of her inspired presence. Do n't stand there cutting me down like a dog, Van, with those hard, sceptic glances! Look at me! My God! man.... What shall I say?— what shall I do?— where turn to find peace—to find courage to bear up this mountainous heart, if not here with you? I came to hunt down those who bear the curse of Cain in their very veins—in whose criminal hands lie the very chronicles and admittances of a murderer's crime. I came to wrench back to their rightful owner the confiscated bonds that were handed over to the informer as a traitor's patrimony—the dog's forty shekels for having betrayed one greater than the state itself into crucifixion, yes, and to wipe away the stain forever. I came with a wild, warlike heart, and my first blow only reveals to me how easy is my conquest, how certain is my prize. Suddenly I confront this strange adver-

sary, and lo! what do I find? Not an army of strong men laughing defiance into my face, not a handful of outlaws as the very name of Selini would betoken, not a shy, invidious, dastardly old dog with jaundiced eyes and a dagger hidden in the folds of his flowing robe — no, not these; but a woman : a pure, innocent, wondering orphan-girl, — Van, my good, patient friend, a peace-offering beatitude, a feature of God upon a human face — a child — a simple budding white rose that a single breath of bitterness would kill — a simple angelic mind that one impure, unbrotherly thought would crush to the earth! Where now are my arms of conquest? Where now this madman's thirst for victory? — where now my pride, my ambition — my heaven? All down prostrate worshipful, prayerful, penitent at a woman's very feet. What think you of that? Look me! — look me in the eyes! Dare you say you believe me not? that I am — that I am — ”

“ Silence, peace! my good fellow, you convince me of nothing so ably as by showing me respect and deference. Sit down : be calm, I beg of you ; and when

you have rallied a little, go on slowly, thoughtfully. What answer has she for all this? . . ."

"Answer?—what answer should she have, being as yet unquestioned. She answers me ere the query is dropt from my heart,—answers me with the properest scorn. God only knows how I have labored to solve these facts into their ready integers, take my ablest choice and act ; but the world would me otherwise, and I am a creature of its circumstance, therefore, I await its prompting."

"But why not take what it is proven the state owes you, Jack, and let the rest sink beyond your cupidity ; what then?"

"A mad query indeed ; wherewith then to pay the lawyers who have successfully engineered this vaunting endeavor to success? This is an enormous debt, — half of the whole estate, and they will doctor and rob her of her last franc upon the pressure of my confession and arguments. She is all innocence of impending danger, unrealizing of the possibility of the prop losing its footing, and her house falling headlong upon her. She is simply, divinely oblivious in her maidenly confid-

ing in the gracious heaven that gave her these things of beauty, as only one spiritually removed far, far beyond the things of this dogged world may be ; and I — I had not the heart to make all plain to her, though many times have I entered bravely upon this task. If I do not this soon, these lawyers will sicken of my hesitancy and sentiment, and head me off in the vital measure ; then would the fiends cry ‘mischief’ indeed.”

“If she be so spiritually beyond things of the world, Van, I think she would care little about it anyway. You were quite safe then, I take it ?”

“Ah, you are ever probing a weak point in my logic, Van, and proving me its unworthiness. But you must forgive that somewhat which savors of lack-charity in me, and cultivate much of that precious same yourself, to consider me with justice. . . . Yes, I went to her, Van, went to her upon the repeated urging and undisguised solicitude on the part of my counsel, went to her, to tell her all. I had letters of rank to her, and she received me like a prince. She made such a cowardly snake out of this spirit of

chivalry that ventured within me by her own godlike complacency, that I had not the courage to unbosom the truth to her. God! think of it; rob her whom I have learned to love, hurl down upon her a thunderbolt from her clear, Olympian heavens, stand by and see her writhe and struggle at the base of her holy temple like a dethroned goddess, while I—while I—O Van! my mind, my mind! . . .”

“You must be calm and considerate, Jack. You wrong yourself beyond redemption in this magnified and strained condition of things. Has she ever given you cause to believe your love reciprocated?”

“What, man!—in this short period?”

“Long enough to foster such a flame in one heart, why not in another’s, who, by virtue of her sex, is all the more susceptible to that sweet same? Why not marry her Jack, and thus save lawyer’s fees all around?”

“What madness! can you mean this, man?—marry her?—solve my destiny with one whose veins tingle with a murderer’s blood?—whose heart bears the native venom of the Selini pravity, and who

carries the crimes of an opprobrious house upon her luckless head? Why Van —”

“What care you for the whole pack of ancestral disgraces? You are too much of America American to put your faith in such indulgent trumperies. You are brave, loyal and deal with immediates; not with the dead and unchronicled, — with the glorious, innocent to day, and not with the cloven-footed, sneaking past, bribed and barbarous, unworthy of our thoughts save in legend. Come now; throw off this traitor’s mask, and stand before the army of facts with a clear, conceiving judgment at your right. If she really be so beautiful, so true, so conquering by her innocent virtue, and proving of spiritual affinity, as you believe, let your atrocious ancestors go to the dogs, Jack; marry her, and let the lawyers look to the four prodigal winds for their fees!... But come; cease your ranting. We shall recur to this tender matter later on.”

“Yours is a quietist’s sort of logic, Van, that conquers me. Be brief; what do you want?”

“I want you to tell me all you know

about that steganographic cypher."

"You know all I know."

"And still I know comparatively nothing. Tell me this, Jack ; is there any of that whole cryptograph that you withheld from the Prefect and his aides?"

"None that I know of."

"That may be doubly construed, and you would me to take it in the reverse, which I refuse to do. Tell me now ; is there any of that confession of Dondolo which you were unable to decipher?"

"No! — ha! — well, why?..."

"Why? — for various reasons ; one in vital particular. Why do you grow pale? You need not start so ; I come not to frighten you, nor bombard your pretty citadel with a disenchanting fusillade of facts. I come to advise a man who has brought upon himself a fearful responsibility, and with it, as becomes the demanding fates, a possibility, not to say probability to sorrow. I would see you follow no rash measure, and would stay you at the breach, as it were, lest you plunge headlong. You destroyed a letter which I sent you enclosed in one of Bagley's. I shall not put you to task for this second

evidence of your weakness for destroying links between us, but only assure you that that letter contained a confession which you would well have pondered over."

"A confession?—what in the name of goodness have you to confess to me?"

"Little, and yet that little of much importance. I rescued from your library waste-paper basket one of the copies of the steganographic revelation of Dondolo which you so carefully made, together with its profuse and more difficult notes, and, aided by your key and the general drift of ideas, supplying deficiencies and carrying conjectures to proof and certitude, I solved the whole!"

"The whole?—the whole cryptograph?—my God!—quick, say—"

"Sit down, you ranting idiot, sit down! Do you think for a moment that I enjoy being clawed in this undignified manner? . . . Yes, I solved the whole Dondolo confession, Jack, solved every line to my utmost satisfaction. I went by your clever notes at first, and once in the clear light wherein they ushered me, I abandoned your key and went forward with an orig-

inal one. Ah, Jack, you are a clever solver of this pergamena mystery, but you have not solved it all, or you would behold things in somewhat of a disenchanting light. That one line—the most unintelligible *Quarto*—made more difficult on account of its abbreviations, as if Dondolo felt it a compunction of conscience to reveal it, and yet dared not do so in this open intelligibility of the others, Jack, would start the hot blood to your temples, and reveal to you a glimpse of purgatory yet undreamt in your most visionary hours.”

“Van ! do you know?—do you realize? — do you take to your heart in earnest—”

“Sit down ! Jack, calm yourself, you fretful porcupine.... But you are in no mood. I can’t talk to you any more now !”

“Yes, yes ; for heavens—”

“No, you defeat your own ends,— you strangle down your own best reserves — your own capabilities to fortune by this savage unbending to your impulses. I will say no more now. There is no need of many words. I only want to assure you that you are in my hands now, Jack, and if I had a mind to be so unbrotherly

and vicious, I could in an hour, set the eyes of all admiring Italy staring scorn into your face. But leave matters with me as they are. Let me give you one word of advice which will prove itself of vital importance and perhaps rescue you from abject defeat. Marry that girl whom you love so tenderly, despite her ancestral opprobrium which you will not be so foolish as to regard, and so save further investigations which may lead to defeat."

"Defeat?—Ah, that word interpreted into my heart's language, means death. Do you mean to say that you have solved that *Quarto*?...."

"Lie down now. You are weary and overcome of your anxieties, Jack, unfit to do any more thinking to-day. Lie down and take a good sleep over this; you need it. I will see you to-morrow night at the Café Florian....Adieu, Jack; ponder well upon my advice, and lose no time apprising the lady of your desires. If you do not act with precision, it will be too late; for those lawyers will mistrust you, go to her, frighten her into hatred of you, and if you lose her, you lose all. Act quickly and with precision, Jack, and

God keep you! . . . Thus far upon the march, ye gods, thus far!"

XX.

A drawing-room of the Palazzo Selini on the Grand Canal. Marie with forced composure half reclining on a luxurious divan. The Vice Consul pleading at her side.

Wherein Mr. Jackson endeavors to effect a reconciliation and to restore harmony.

"AM I so unkind then, my dear lady, am I proven so unkind an interloper in entreating to do nothing in haste in this violent matter? —"

"I act with precision — with resolution — with tact; with haste, never, my kind sir, with haste never!"

" . . . And in that I merely as a friend to you both uppoise my finger in honest premonition lest you do aught that you be sorry for — in this am I so brutal an eavesdropper in a drama of mysteries and of peril? —"

"*Dio mio* ! Signore ; of what turbulent, what volatile inconsistencies are your countrymen made ? Look you ! how can I be calm — how possibly stand possessed and composed in the face of such an army of impending catastrophes — "

"Ah, my good lady, name them all catastrophes — all but one. Don't, I beg sincerely, don't name my generous-souled friend Jack Donalds a catastrophe ; for that proves that you cannot be earnestly apprised of how dear an interest he has in you, nor how dear — "

"Silence ! I beseech you. Why do you fret me — chafe me — crush me ? You know not woman. You cannot and never can understand my feelings in this violent affair. You must not stand blind and indifferent to the fact that I hold accounts that bear vitally upon this cause — secrets that I cannot now disclose to you."

"Why say you that ?"

"Why say I this ? — it is the truth. Look me ! — look at these hands : have they known labor ere this ? Look into my heart : has it ere known hate, despair, shame, infamy ? Tell me ?"

"Why should it now? There is no reason in your curse,—no mercy in your inflictions. You do not understand what a good, kind heart glows beneath the violent aspect of my friend and countryman when in your presence. What are Americans that you abhor us so?"

"Bigots — bigots! Do you hear me? — bigots. You have no respect for another's religion; no respect for another's home; for another's love; for another's traditions and sacrest of treasures. You come over here, hold up your glittering hands, and we poor starving down-trodden and broken-hearted cast our holy of holies at your feet — wherefore? — for love of you or your's — no! For the saving of virtue, for the sparing of our children degradations and crime, for the sparing of our aged the horrors of hunger. You rob our churches; you violate our homes; you crush our arts, and un-temple our religions—all, all to satisfy your caprices. You have no respect, no love—no sympathy—no souls. You are dead, and worse than dead: you are a nation of triflers."

"That's a very severe anathema, my

good lady, a far deeper scourge than is our due. Do you think Jack Donalds a trifler?"

"Trifler?—I know no such word in our language, no such thought in my soul. My heart is an earnest heart; my life an earnest life. God! look you. What am I?—an orphan—a friendless, motherless girl cast out upon the world a pauper—yes, a pauper: do you stare at that word? And why?—all to satisfy—"

"No, no; do not say that—you must not say that!"

"It is the truth, however dark it may appear to both of us. Jack Donalds has begun—he cannot, dare not go back. All his affairs are in the hands of these leeches; they hold him by iron chains. Despite his wish, his reproof, his prayers, his demand, they are going to fell me to the ground. I have been assured this by those who have my interest at heart. My little empire is toppling; it will soon fall and crush me. Neither you, nor I, nor Jack Donalds, nor any human agency can save me. All is in the hands of the state. I am doomed. I have but two alternatives:

one, the convent ; the other —”

“The other?....”

“The other....oh, I beg of you, good friend, leave me — leave me alone a time. I am so weak, — so — so tired — weary — crushed!....”

“Thank God, my dear lady, that you realize that there *is* another alternative. May I encourage him then? — may I tell him that you will accept that alternative? — may I tell him?”

“Tell whom?”

“My friend whom I implore you —”

“Tell him what I tell you : that — that my heart is not broken — not crushed — not torn and bleeding as he may believe it ; it is turned to stone : *I hate him!*”

“Oh, do not say that. Be calm — be calm, my gentle woman. Let me be your friend. Tell me ; who told you the secret of his regard for you?”

“Who told me? — my eyes told me ; my ears told me ; my lips — my nature — my soul — my heart, told me *Jack Donalds loves me*. What ! can the oracle stand undisclosed in such a mad, quivering presence? The first day he came long months ago, I read all. I saw it in his first

glance. I saw what now I have seen confirmed a thousand fold. Jack Donalds is a woman's slave! — I am that woman. What have you to say to that?"

"I have nothing to answer — nothing, God knows!"

"Oh, my good sir, if you are that man's friend, for God's sake tell him. Spare him the mortification of knowing it from my lips — that I hate — that I loathe, — abhor the very shadow of his beautiful face! . . . Oh, what strange, strange people must those be where yonder sun sets — your countrymen — your brothers! They are but half human."

"Certainly the inhumanity with which you upbraid Mr. Donalds is most derogatory in comparison to his which was so easily overthrown by a better impulse while yours is inveterate and stubborn even to his kindest, tenderest reproach. Let me whisper a secret into your heart, my dear, kind lady —"

"Oh, why do you talk more, Signore, when you know the very foundation of your logic is a bubble — the very bridge over which you appeal beckoning me with such hopeful illusions, would bear

up but a little mote—a grain of dust where-on you would impend an immortal soul? Words are so painful to me. I beseech you to say no more. Let the blow fall as is his demand; God knows I am ready.”

“Ah, how you mistake him, my kind lady? If you could only know that such a thought is furtherest from his wish. It is not his demand; he shrinks from it. The thought of taking from you the prop of your life—why, God keep you! my dear lady, it is most repulsive to him. You do not seem to know,—to see, to realize the true secret—”

“What! Signore, I do n't know his secret? Think you that? *Iddio!* Am I so fooled,—so wretched a poor, blind bat that I cannot read the daylight? Spare me. I *do* know his secret: I *do* know his secret. I know that which Jack Donalds with all his fine features, his elegant approach, his eloquent eyes—is not brave enough—is not *man* enough to tell me. He is a moral coward—”

“Do not say so; if you knew how far from the truth your severities lie—how that you strike an angel believing him a fiend....But no; why do I say more? I

perceive you in no mood to take to reason simply, unrestrainedly my quieting philosophy. I came to heal a wound—I have torn it wider; I came to bring you an olive and an amaranth from him—you have proved them hemlock and asphodel, and curst them beneath your feet. Let them lie there for a time, my dear lady, let them lie in the dust before you for a season: you will soon come to your devouter senses, and raise them to your bosom. Do nothing in haste, I pray you; do nothing in haste. Jack Donalds loves you: he will do no coward's deed under so pure and exalted an inspiration, God bless you, no. I thank you that you have granted me this hearing; and be assured that however dear at heart I have the interest of my friend and countryman, I have no less interest in her whom he has honored with his love. Realize this, I beg of you, and realize me devoutly your friend ever —"

"The Signore is most kind —"

"And a warm 'good morning' — *tanti complimenti e tante grazie ! . . .*"

XXI.

The U. S. Consulate. A spacious hall in the old palace, where Mr. Jackson sits entertaining Van in the midst of antiquities and ugly office-furniture.

Wherein the climate changes from a temperate to a torrid degree of interest.

"A letter for me, Mr. Jackson?"

"Yes, it has been lying here at the Consulate for three hours. Jack thought it might intercept you here, doubtless, and so it has."

"Ah! This is strange enough, indeed, — strange enough! Jack Donalds can do more perplexing things in an hour than a whole regiment of Rosicrucians. Here he is, writing me his woes and worriment when it was but last night he uncovered that little Pandora-box on his heart to me, and let its little devils out to roam at will. Excuse me, sir; let me pry into — or rather let it pry into me, since I now stand on the defensive. . . . There! — there Jack Donalds, you are as good as a dead man — as good as a mummy. You have

done it at last!—your warrant is signed.”

“Done it, has he, Van? Well, Donalds is a man of deeds—an extremist; I suppose whatever he has done is either very, very good, or very ‘bloody’ bad, as Bagley puts it.”

“Done?—he has done the most contemptibly bárbarous thing—yielded to an impulse that I should think a witless fanatic could resist. He has simply ruined everything—struck the pretty image of his making a blow of disenchantment that in the rebound shall tumble Jack Donalds from his self-imposed empire, and fell him to the earth like a pretender!”

“Well, well; but you explain nothing. You race up and down, and chant your violent ditties to the dumbest of ears. I have no idea what you can mean.”

“I mean Mr. Jackson, that I advised Jack Donalds to go to the lady of his transcendental flame, and conquer her by a lover’s stratagem rather than by a lawyer’s. In short, I advised him to marry Marie Selini; and what think you he says?—listen to this:—

‘Dear Van:—My heart is bounding with delight! I have done it at last.

God bless you for your advice in this earnest matter, I resolved to go to her and tell her all. My heart failed me at her threshold, and I returned home. There in the solitude of my study, I wrote her a letter which has just left my hands, and by this delicious moment lies in hers. I beseeched her to fly with me! I told her a great peril hovers over her destiny, that what she had dreamt might come to pass, certainly would. That she might solve the whole by flying with me to the mountains. She shall not, dare not refuse me! We shall go direct to America and wait till two or three of those patriotic lawyers die off, and then return. Success is certain! I have you to thank for the first glimpse into heaven which I now enjoy!' Listen to that! did you ever hear such twaddle, Mr. Jackson? What cares she for Jack Donalds?—for a mere stranger—for a proven visionary who does not even speak her language? How deliciously, how cleverly might he have accomplished this thing had he only been something of a strategist,—something more than a mere love-strangled dreamer!"

"Strange, very strange, Van. I am much afraid your friend Jack Donalds is in a heap of trouble."

"He is in a most dangerous condition of mind evidently, and I fear I shall scarcely be able to medicine this disease by any of my ministrations. He is a clever fellow and deserves praise ; but his project is doomed if the truth be known."

"Impossible ! — how say you that !"

"I scarcely dare unbosom to you Mr. Jackson, though you have ever proved a most trusty and becomingly silent advisor. I would not that my secret reach his ears for anything, for in this mysterious *Quarto* lies my only hold upon Jack Donalds. He may marry that young woman, and find happiness ; but if he dares pursue this course longer and more persistently, I shall unravel to his most blasting satisfaction this one line which stands inapprehensible to him, and nip his blooming project in the bud."

"Upon what evidence ? — what authority ? You have given me a thousand shrugging hints of this thing, but you withhold the oracle all the same. Come ;

out with it. What about this unfathomable *Quarto* ? ”

“Ah, my good Mr. Jackson, let me begin at the beginning. Let me creep on to the point through this whole series, for I perceive that you have but an imperfect knowlege of them....No, thank you, sir ; I'm not thirsty, and I do n't want to smoke. There is fire enough in this thing to keep me warm.”

“Yes, as it has set Italy in a roaring conflagration, I guess we can toast our fingertips by it. Come, out with it, Van.”

“Well, to begin with, here is a copy of the cryptographic confession of Dondolo with the proper lettering. Notice, please, below this, you have the original abbreviations completed in lower case, and the full translation : —

1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9. 10. 11. 12. 13. 14. 15. 16. 17. 18. 19. 20. 21. 22. 23. 24. 25. 26. 27. 28. 29. 30. 31. 32. 33. 34. 35. 36. 37. 38. 39. 40. 41. 42. 43. 44. 45. 46. 47. 48. 49. 50. 51. 52. 53. 54. 55. 56. 57. 58. 59. 60. 61. 62. 63. 64. 65. 66. 67. 68. 69. 70. 71. 72. 73. 74. 75. 76. 77. 78. 79. 80. 81. 82. 83. 84. 85. 86. 87. 88. 89. 90. 91. 92. 93. 94. 95. 96. 97. 98. 99. 100. 101. 102. 103. 104. 105. 106. 107. 108. 109. 110. 111. 112. 113. 114. 115. 116. 117. 118. 119. 120. 121. 122. 123. 124. 125. 126. 127. 128. 129. 130. 131. 132. 133. 134. 135. 136. 137. 138. 139. 140. 141. 142. 143. 144. 145. 146. 147. 148. 149. 150. 151. 152. 153. 154. 155. 156. 157. 158. 159. 160. 161. 162. 163. 164. 165. 166. 167. 168. 169. 170. 171. 172. 173. 174. 175. 176. 177. 178. 179. 180. 181. 182. 183. 184. 185. 186. 187. 188. 189. 190. 191. 192. 193. 194. 195. 196. 197. 198. 199. 200. 201. 202. 203. 204. 205. 206. 207. 208. 209. 210. 211. 212. 213. 214. 215. 216. 217. 218. 219. 220. 221. 222. 223. 224. 225. 226. 227. 228. 229. 230. 231. 232. 233. 234. 235. 236. 237. 238. 239. 240. 241. 242. 243. 244. 245. 246. 247. 248. 249. 250. 251. 252. 253. 254. 255. 256. 257. 258. 259. 260. 261. 262. 263. 264. 265. 266. 267. 268. 269. 270. 271. 272. 273. 274. 275. 276. 277. 278. 279. 280. 281. 282. 283. 284. 285. 286. 287. 288. 289. 290. 291. 292. 293. 294. 295. 296. 297. 298. 299. 300. 301. 302. 303. 304. 305. 306. 307. 308. 309. 310. 311. 312. 313. 314. 315. 316. 317. 318. 319. 320. 321. 322. 323. 324. 325. 326. 327. 328. 329. 330. 331. 332. 333. 334. 335. 336. 337. 338. 339. 340. 341. 342. 343. 344. 345. 346. 347. 348. 349. 350. 351. 352. 353. 354. 355. 356. 357. 358. 359. 360. 361. 362. 363. 364. 365. 366. 367. 368. 369. 370. 371. 372. 373. 374. 375. 376. 377. 378. 379. 380. 381. 382. 383. 384. 385. 386. 387. 388. 389. 390. 391. 392. 393. 394. 395. 396. 397. 398. 399. 400. 401. 402. 403. 404. 405. 406. 407. 408. 409. 410. 411. 412. 413. 414. 415. 416. 417. 418. 419. 420. 421. 422. 423. 424. 425. 426. 427. 428. 429. 430. 431. 432. 433. 434. 435. 436. 437. 438. 439. 440. 441. 442. 443. 444. 445. 446. 447. 448. 449. 450. 451. 452. 453. 454. 455. 456. 457. 458. 459. 460. 461. 462. 463. 464. 465. 466. 467. 468. 469. 470. 471. 472. 473. 474. 475. 476. 477. 478. 479. 480. 481. 482. 483. 484. 485. 486. 487. 488. 489. 490. 491. 492. 493. 494. 495. 496. 497. 498. 499. 500. 501. 502. 503. 504. 505. 506. 507. 508. 509. 510. 511. 512. 513. 514. 515. 516. 517. 518. 519. 520. 521. 522. 523. 524. 525. 526. 527. 528. 529. 530. 531. 532. 533. 534. 535. 536. 537. 538. 539. 540. 541. 542. 543. 544. 545. 546. 547. 548. 549. 550. 551. 552. 553. 554. 555. 556. 557. 558. 559. 560. 561. 562. 563. 564. 565. 566. 567. 568. 569. 570. 571. 572. 573. 574. 575. 576. 577. 578. 579. 580. 581. 582. 583. 584. 585. 586. 587. 588. 589. 590. 591. 592. 593. 594. 595. 596. 597. 598. 599. 600. 601. 602. 603. 604. 605. 606. 607. 608. 609. 610. 611. 612. 613. 614. 615. 616. 617. 618. 619. 620. 621. 622. 623. 624. 625. 626. 627. 628. 629. 630. 631. 632. 633. 634. 635. 636. 637. 638. 639. 640. 641. 642. 643. 644. 645. 646. 647. 648. 649. 650. 651. 652. 653. 654. 655. 656. 657. 658. 659. 660. 661. 662. 663. 664. 665. 666. 667. 668. 669. 670. 671. 672. 673. 674. 675. 676. 677. 678. 679. 680. 681. 682. 683. 684. 685. 686. 687. 688. 689. 690. 691. 692. 693. 694. 695. 696. 697. 698. 699. 700. 701. 702. 703. 704. 705. 706. 707. 708. 709. 710. 711. 712. 713. 714. 715. 716. 717. 718. 719. 720. 721. 722. 723. 724. 725. 726. 727. 728. 729. 730. 731. 732. 733. 734. 735. 736. 737. 738. 739. 740. 741. 742. 743. 744. 745. 746. 747. 748. 749. 750. 751. 752. 753. 754. 755. 756. 757. 758. 759. 760. 761. 762. 763. 764. 765. 766. 767. 768. 769. 770. 771. 772. 773. 774. 775. 776. 777. 778. 779. 780. 781. 782. 783. 784. 785. 786. 787. 788. 789. 790. 791. 792. 793. 794. 795. 796. 797. 798. 799. 800. 801. 802. 803. 804. 805. 806. 807. 808. 809. 810. 811. 812. 813. 814. 815. 816. 817. 818. 819. 820. 821. 822. 823. 824. 825. 826. 827. 828. 829. 830. 831. 832. 833. 834. 835. 836. 837. 838. 839. 840.

"In nome dī Dio, Amen.

Io, Marco Dondolo, nella Prigione del Palazzo Ducale, giuro esser Questo la Verità per la Grazia del Cielo.

Primo.—Che Antonio Selini, Ridollo Largombi e quattro altri hanno fatto una congiura contro lo Stato.

Secondo.—Che Io non sono uno dei cospiratori.

Terza. — Che Antonio Selini fece questa accusa per la quale Io perdo la Vita.

Essa è del tutto falsa. Io sono innocente.

Cristo accolga l'anima mia!

MARCO DONDOLO.

"In the name of God, Amen!

I, Marco Dondolo, in the prison of the Ducal Palace, swear this to be the truth, by the grace of heaven.

First.—That Antonio Selini, Ridollo Largombi and four others have made a conspiracy against the State.

Second.—That I am not one of the conspirators.

Third.—That Antonio Selini made this accusation by the which I lose my life. It was false from the first. I am innocent.

Christ! my spirit, bear to thee.

MARCO DONDOLO.

"Now this, Mr. Jackson, is as you perceive, the translation as presented to the Prefect by Jack : but it is incomplete. Notice the *Primo*, *Secondo*, *Terzo*, but where is the *Quarto* ?"

"And is there a *Quarto* in the parchment original of Dondolo ?"

"Certainly, sir ; see for yourself. But Jack has not solved it, so he has passed it by as irrelevant and has said nothing, about it ; but that *Quarto* is a death warrant to his project ; it defeats him."

"It certainly looks as easy as the rest George."

"Does it indeed ? Look you ; this line is so abbreviated and erased as to stand almost baffling our combined efforts. I have solved it, however, by replacing the missing dots lost by the closing of the wounds before Dondolo was executed, and Jack Donalds must wait upon me for that line."

"Strange — very strange. How did you discover a clew to all this ?"

"Why, it's all easy enough. Just draw a line from dot to dot and you have the letter. They simply solve themselves. Look at M, for instance ; it is ∴. Draw

your line from dot to dot, and you have it in *perfectionem*. There's W, see, it's ::· and L ::. Take the first line. *In nome di Dio, Amen*. Look now; abbreviated it stands, I : N · N · O ·· M :: D ·· D ·· I : O ·· A · M :: E · N ·. The vowels are the only difficulties on account of their briefness; but there being only five of them, it was easy to solve that, so that every clew gained was a victory over the dozen others, see?"

"Well, I confess I do see a little; but I never did have a head for figures. You must give me time to let my poor old noddle make haste slowly. We old heads can't expect to skip along as smart and dapper as you younger wits. But let that pass; what of the *Quarto*, my boy, quick! stop your rhapsodizing; give me the *Quarto*!"

"Ah, not so hastily. Here is my translation. See! it is the exact counterpart of his, with the exception of that one line which is in the parchment, and which he has withheld, and would that the world believe is not there, since he cannot solve it. You and I, remember, are now the only two living beings who know the

Quarto. Guard my secret carefully, most carefully !”

“What! — is this the truth? — impossible! Then is Jack Donalds not the descendant of Doge Dondolo after all! —”

“Read the line ‘*Quarto—Che Luigi, che porta il mio nome, non e mio figlio!*’ — Luigi, who bears my name, is not my son.’ Jack being a direct descendant of this Luigi, supposed son of the executed Dondolo, is in nowise heir to the Dondolo estate, and has no right to pursue this course. Now if he marries Marie Selini, all will be well; for half of this estate he will in that way recover, and she will represent the deficiency retained by the state. If he does not, and the officials pry into this one line and discover it, he will lose all !”

“Truly enough,—truly enough? Bless us! what a revelation would this be to him! —”

“Softly, softly! — I hear a footstep. We must not be interrupted, nor must this thing discovered.”

“I know the step —”

“Indeed? — who may it be then in such haste?”

“I think it is my gondolier Vittorio.

Unlock the door, Van, and let him come in. He is in trouble — he bears some important message.... What's the matter, Vittorio?"

"Oh, Signore!"

"Why, you are all wet; you look like a drowned marmot?"

"I fell into the Canal at the *traghetto*, making haste to come to you, Signore, to tell you —"

"To tell me what?"

"*Dio*, Signore! and have you not heard about the Signorina?"

"Who? Heavens! you frighten me. Who? — Marie Salini?"

"Why, Signore the whole town is up in arms. Hark! do n't you hear those bells? — ah, Signore, God help us now! The city is in an uproar — in a horrible ferment!"

"Over what? — whom? — why? What is the matter with you, Vittorio? — what is the town up in arms for?"

"Why in search for her!"

"In search of whom?"

"Signorina Selini, I say, man! She has disappeared."

"Disappeared!"

"I just saw their *gondolieri*, and they told me with blanched faces that the three lawyers of Signor Jack Donalds had called upon her, frightened her till she was half crazed, and then — then she disappeared, no one knows whither!"

"Ah, Van, I think your solicitude was something of a prophecy. Those lawyers, fearful lest he abandon his project now in its prime and leave them in the lurch by marrying this lady, have gone to her and told her the whole truth. She has been frightened into some insane deed."

"Horrible! — does Donalds know this I wonder?"

"God help him! if he does not prove an insane man now, he will by the advent of this — hark! who comes?"

"It's Bagley: I know his step, let him in, Vittorio!..."

"I—I can't stir, Signore, I am—I am—"

"Ho, Bagley! For God's sake! look at that face —"

"Mr. Jackson, what has happened to—"

"...Marster Jack, sir!"

"Well?—"

"Lord 'elp me poor old—"

"But what! — out with it, you strang-

ling old craven ! Where is he ? ”

“ E ’s gan’ sir ! ”

“ Gone ? — ”

“ Gan’, sir ! ”

“ Gone where, Bagley ? ”

“ I dunno, sir, God h’only knows, sir. He lef’ this paper ’ere for you, sir, and ’e’s gan ; so ’elp my poor — ”

“ You frighten me, Bagley. What’s he been doing all day ? — quick, tell me ! ”

“ Doin’ sir ? — ’e’s been a-ranting ’op and dawn the whole day, sir, a-weepin’ and a-slashin’ things everlastin’, sir, God save me, if ’e ain’t Then he got that letter from that Selini lady, you know, this very mornin’ ! ”

“ From her ? — from Marie Selini ? — a letter from her ? ”

“ Why not, sir, why not ? ’E war awake the whole night, again, sir, the whole blessed night, a figurin’ an’ a figurin’ on that bloody, skin thing as has made all this God-blessed rumpus, sir, ’e war. About midnight I wakes h’up, I does, and wot you think. h’I sees him h’all bent dobbble h’over some o’ his fussin’s, an’ h’all to onct, sir, ’e give such a tarn-ashened ’owl, sir, ah, God bless me trote,

I can't h'imitate it, sir, it was a woo-oo-woo-oo-r-r-rip, sir, only ten times bloodier loud, God bless me ef 't was n't!"

"Well, well; never mind. Go on, Bagley, to the point."

"It's all pints, sir; there war n't nothin' but pints, sir, an' I feel 'em a-stickin' in me yet —"

"Well, what did you say?"

"Say?—I did n't say nothin'; good hevings, sir, wot should I say? h'I simply h'opened my h'eyes, sir, and stared like as I war a bloody h'ox; and then all to onct, sir, like as before 'e give another 'owl, an' says 'My God! is it possible? 'Ave I really solved the *Quarto*;' or some such thing, 'alas, alas!' says he 'I know it h'all—I know it h'all!' Them was tragic screechin's, sir, ah, God bless me! An' I says 'you knows what, sir?—what do you knows?'...but afore he could h'answer me, he staggered back an' fell flat, sir, flat on the floor h'in a 'eap, did he fall, sir, insensible as a bloody sea-serpent!"

"Well, well, Bagley, go on, I beg of you!"

"Well, sir, I thought 'e war dead, so h'I

picks 'im h'up an' lays him on the bed, and, sir, for two hours he stirred not a muscle, but lay like he was passed my help. Then I rubs and douses 'im with cold water and 'fum'ry and sich stuff,—you know Marter Jack likes them fiddlin's—and finally 'e starts h'up, h'opens his h'awful eyes, sir, says somethin' about 'Marie,' and my blood run cold to look at im! Why, sir, 'e's stark mad and ravin'. Then at six o'clock 'e got a letter from that Selini lady. One of her gondoly-men fetched it, sir, I saw him comin', and I runs to meet 'im. He was white as death, sir, says never a word—only gives me that letter. I runs to Master Jack, gives him the letter, and you should have seen 'im! He went h'off into another of them convulsions; but 'e soon came to, and then locked 'imself h'up w'ere 'e 'as been all day long a-singin', a-dancin', an' then 'e cries, and then 'owls, and bellows, and laughs, and prays, and Lord knows what not —”

“Well, well, — what has happened now?”

“That's the pint I 'm nearin' you to now, sir, that's the pint. All to onct 'e

breaks down the door, runs to me like as he were a mad dog, gives me this letter to take to you, God bless y', and then he jumps into his gondoly and rows off by himself like a shot, sir, heaven only knows where. 'E's desperate—desperate about somethin'. 'E's goin' to do somethin' h'awful, sir, ef you do n't head 'im h'off—somethin' h'awful!"

"Jack must not go unattended. He must be found and we must find him. Excuse me, Mr. Jackson, you must not abandon me now. Help me to my task; we shall search him out! My coat and hat, Bagley—quick! Which way did he go?—which—you go back to his rooms and see if he has not returned; we will go and inform the police!"

"But that letter, sir, that letter...."

"Oh, yes; where—where did I throw it?—Come, Mr. Jackson; thank heaven, we have found a noble friend in you. I never saw the man in trouble that came to you and had not occasion to bless you with all his heart ere the day was done. Come; to the gondola!...."

"But, sir, h'I say, you *must* read that letter!"

"All right, Bagley, directly. Mr. Jackson, sit there, please ; tell the gondoliers to make all possible haste ! Bagley, wait for me there, and — and —"

"God bless ye, sir !"

"Mr. Jackson, you do n't seem at all alarmed or mystified. You are cool enough in this violent climax—"

"Nothing alarms me ; nothing mystifies me. It's as clear and transparent as this water at ebb tide through which you can discern all the supposed mystery at the bottom."

"Well, well ; what then is so plain to you ?"

"Jack wrote Maria Selini, offering to fly with her ?—"

"Well ?"

"She wrote him a letter which he has acted upon ?—"

"Well ?"

"They have both disappeared, and it is mutually understood, evidently ?—"

"Well ?"

"Well, I should call that simply a business like, well-planned elopement !"

"Wormwood, wormwood !"

XXII.

The quite unintelligible letter in question.

George:—The heavens at last break forth in undefiled, auspicious loveliness, and I....Van....my letter, and she listened to my prayer. God! I scarcely yet believe it. She....is to be mine: to meet me....and we shall fly together. I must see you once more before we part, Van, and *alone*. On the lagoons, dear fellow....you know the post we usually tie to when we go there for a quiet hour of reading and rhapsodizing. There must....must you meet me and without fail....*alone* I say. Fourth post from the San Georgio wall....You may not find me, and if not....letter tied to the post. Take your large torch....make no outcry. This has....oh, my head! poor Jack Donalds....to heaven! I knew it would....then if you have not time. She loves me!—she loves me!my secret, Van. We shall meet at

home. Do n't forget the torch, or you cannot find me. Search diligently.... and let the rest go. My hour is comeand may the good God bless you and keep you devoutly in earnest in your endeavor for the bettering of men.

JACK DONALDS.

XXIII.

Before the Cafe Florian on the Piazza St.

*Marco. Mr. Jackson and Van seated
at the table, listening to the band
and watching the promenad-
ers. Early evening.*

*Wherein Van gives
vent to a few the-
ories, and parts
with the Vice Con-
sul, undertaking
a perilous errand.*

"Ah, yes, Mr. Jackson, Donald's life has been one mysterious whirlwind of events, commanding one's admiration and applause at one moment, marvelling one at another, and turning the tide most

reproachfully in reverse at the third. A most unfathomable — no, thank you kindly, *cerise au cognac* and I have had a falling out — ”

“What! are n’t you fond — ”

“No; I’ll have....Nicola! a *granita*, please....that always seems to refresh me so: cools my throat and head.”

“But go on, Van; I did n’t mean to interrupt you, old fellow. You were talking of Jack’s idiosyncrasies; on with them.”

“Well, we travelled together in Norway and Sweden, Jack and I, and, as you know, the old maid peripatetics say that there are two ways a woman may learn a man thoroughly; marry him, or travel in his company. Now travelling with Jack Donalds was such a wholesome schooling in that direction that it suffices; I scarcely regret that the good God saw fit to bar me from that further corroboration.”

“And still, Van, you know Jack would make a mighty good husband. He’s kind, he’s thoughtful and generous when out of his freaks. He ought to have a wife about ten stone six all brawn and blood, able to beard a lion and straight-

jacket this fellow once in a while. I'm afraid these gazelle-eyed, fragile, ethereal little southern seraphs won't do. He ought to have a tiger-tamer for a wife,—one born and bred a gladiator."

"Oh, not quite that, Mr. Jackson, not quite that. But to return. We had a plan for a jaunt through Japan next year; but of course that stands like a blasted fig tree before this stroke of a withering Providence, and the project shall never be brought up again. Where did you go when we parted so abruptly?"

"Everywhere. I went to the Prefect, and then informed his lawyers. Then I searched cafès and every accessible haunt where I had seen his gaunt, solitary figure; but night is a difficult mask to penetrate, and I soon gave up the task and settled down at the *Vittoria* for a glass of *Kirsch*, when I saw you plodding down from the *Merceria*, and so hailed you. To tell the truth, Van, I am very anxious indeed about Jack and his Italian love. I somehow feel that they are together, hidden right here in the city. They could not reach the mainland without passports or a proper excuse for making the jour-

ney by night. The friends of the young lady have utilized all the points of vantage, and still no news. It looks very ominous. If Jack *should* turn up now, he must be hurried beyond the frontier, for these Italians would be up in arms against him. This thing will not do for Venice. What said that letter?"

"Oh, it was a rambling jargon which told me little and mystified me much. Did I not show it you?"

"No; you seemed so overwhelmed that you tore it up and threw it into the Canal."

"I fear he has found the secret of the *Quarto*. Bagley, too, do you remember, said he had been working at it all night, and that he suddenly leaped up, exclaimed something that proved that he had found what he had so violently sought, and fell insensible."

"Then, Van, he knows the secret that defeats him?"

"I believe it; and in the midst of his grief and chagrin, received this missive from Marie Selini which 'lifted him to heaven,' as he affirms. But I can scarcely concur with you in the thought that she

would be insane enough to elope with Jack Donalds. Why should she? She has everything in her power now."

"Certainly, Van; but she believed otherwise, and believes so yet. The lawyers told her that she was practically an outcast—a penniless nobody; and these astounding tidings followed up by a proposal, rash as it was, from her persecutor, she turns and saves herself by marrying him. Why not?—this is no vision; this is business-like logic, and I admire her for it."

"You make a great mistake, Mr. Jackson, a very palpable blunder in so construing the present plight. What does she know of him?—nothing!"

"Fully as much as he does of her, and behold the violence of his passion! Why is she not equally attracted to him? What know we of that which has passed between them these few heart-throbbing months? They may have had it planned to a system."

"Nonsense; she knows nothing of him, cares nothing for him.... But let that pass. Let us not put our nerves too desperately to the rack, for at mid-

night I shall meet him on the lagoons and know all."

"Meet him?"

"Yes ; I thought I told you. I shall meet him on the lagoons, fourth post from the San Giorgio wall. I go alone and shall carry a torch, according to his explicit injunction, that I may signal him from a distance, and hail him from his hiding. Come ; there strikes the half past eleven bell ! I ordered my sandalo at this very moment ; my man must be there now. Will you kindly accompany me to the Piazzetta ?"

"Certainly ! . . . This grows apace — this paradox. Do you think she will be there with him ?"

"I have long since ceased to be vulnerable to the most aggressive surprises, Mr. Jackson."

"A strange pass of circumstance, indeed, would it prove. I can scarcely realize what are you about to attempt, Van. I must say I scarcely approve of these midnight prowlings on the infested lagoons. You may be run down and robbed by some of those witted outlaws. See ! it is fiercely dark over the water, the Mag-

giore scarcely visible even."

"I shall leave you my valuables. Ah, my man approaches yonder. How tired and worn-out he looks ; surely this is hard abuse he suffers so unwincingly at my hand these much troubled days. It will take but half an hour to row out there, the tide in my favor, and you, in the meantime, may go to poor Bagley and pacify him. I think we had better ship Bagley to England at all events, to-morrow. A few days more of this uncertain climax that refuses to herald either safety or disaster, will kill the man."

"Have a care, Van, the tide is ebbing like a freshet and may carry you out to sea ! I do n't like this affair, my boy, not at all. I do wish you would overrule your scruples, and take your man to companion you."

"I must respect Jack's wishes. He commands me to meet him alone ; and if another should accompany me, he would have righteous cause to be displeased, and, perhaps, refuse to come out of his hiding. Well, well ; I must delay no longer. Wait for me at the Consulate ; I shall return instantly upon ascertain-

ing facts and satisfying all demands. If he is not there, I shall find a letter of explanation tied to that fourth pillar, so he instructs me."

"A letter, say you?"

"Most assuredly,—a letter!"

"Then, sir, you will find the letter; but *not* your clever strategist Jack Donalds!"

"Mayhap, mayhap,—*Iddio solo sa....*"

XXVI.

*Final communication from Van to the
Vice Consul, dated at San Lorenzo
Hospital, and despatched by secret
messenger to the Consulate.*

*Wherein Van gives a
detailed history of
his perilous adventure
on the lagoons
in search of Jack
Donalds.*

MY DEAR MR. JACKSON :
—What I now write must
run the gauntlet of these
doctors, and perhaps reach you, probably
not. I have bribed two of these pitying
and still pitiable nurses to my cause, and

they, at my solemn dictation, have propped me up on my pillows, given me wherewith to write and make known to you the secret of my midnight visit upon our poor Jack Donalds. You see they think I attempted suicide, and I suppose that is an offence nearly as criminal as an attempt at murder, being little short of it, and will arrest me the moment I am well enough to sit up and answer the magistrate's questions. They found me, as the papers have informed you, hatless, coatless, in my bare feet, high and dry on the mud where the tide had carried my sandalo, and, depositing it there, ebbcd and left me imprisoned as it were, in a sea of perilous quicksand. These doctors here at the hospital have pried me and pumped me for particulars that bear upon the disappearance of Jack Donalds and Marie Selini, as they feel convinced that I have some inseparable connection with the mysterious affair; but I feigned weak-headedness, and they could not gain any satisfaction. I told them all sorts of simple lies, and then contradicted them in the next breath with most artful innocence, till one of the doctors — a Ger-

man who could not find the exact phrase in Italian !—called me a *verrückter Esel*, which, being translated into legitimate Italian by myself for their benefit, they smiled derisively in their defeat, and vanished. They have the letter which I found on the fourth post from the San Giorgio wall, but it is in Jack's horrible chirography, bad enough in his sanity, but here simply an insolvable scrawl to any but one as used to suffering this cold sort of martyrdom as I. If you can, secure this letter from the doctors. You see they think I wrote it as a farewell, and all that ; but if you can prove otherwise, do so, and put it in safe keeping ; it will verify all I am about to relate. It seems to have made so crushing an impression upon me that I can now close my eyes, and on my vision, trace every character. If I still have time after I have said all I hope to be unbosomed of now, I shall give you the gist of it, as I can recall it nearly word for word.

You will infer, and rightly, too, from the above, that I found a letter awaiting me, instead of Jack Donalds. Let me

tell you now, before I proceed with details, that I did meet Jack Donalds face to face. We did not speak;— I will tell you why. Neither was he alone ; Marie Selini was at his side with her sweet face ever upon him. Whether she loves him now, or hates him, God only knows!

You will think it the most astounding thing in the world that I escaped alive, and truly now that I think of all, I have reason to be most prayerfully thankful. I left you standing by the Byzantine pillars, staring in the direction of my disappearance, and then I saw you sit there on the stone steps, bow and cover your face with your hands. What could have been your thoughts, dear, kind Mr. Jackson? Ah! could you have had a prophet's inkling into this ordeal I was about to pass through? I wonder now, —yes, and wondered then till my eyes were dimmed as I dashed on toward San Giorgio. The tide was ebbing swiftly, and I raced by the grim, spectral wall like a comet, out into the channels toward the lagoons — does my hand tremble too much to be legible? — and not stopping to light my big torch, I made for

the first post as nearly as I could calculate. I ran up against it with such a jolt and a crash that I went headlong into the bottom of my sandalo. Only then did I realize how swift the tide and.... excuse, Mr. Jackson, if I ramble. This fevering of my temples—this horrible throbbing!—but never mind my ailments. Do me one kindness though, before I forget to beseech your favor to another task: look up those *barca*-men who risked their lives so soldier-like in the perilous quicksands of the lagoon to rescue me, go to my trunk, and in the left hand corner you will find a leather bag containing about a score of twenty-dollar gold pieces. Kindly divide these among the brave fellows, with my warmest compliments and thanks couched in the most gracious *dialetto*, keeping a placing eye upon them till I can break away from this. Not a thing upon my person was touched with a violating hand, though on the Piazzetta, I neglected to place into your custody the most valuable treasure I carried at the time of parting. These gallant men must be rewarded and made as distinguished in

their local way as only such deeds can make warriors in times of peace, for I would certainly been drowned with the rising of the tide, or been carried out to sea and perished of starvation, had they not risked their lives and saved me.

But to my task again ! Have patience with my rambling, I implore you, for I am obliged to stop and rest every moment, and then rally again to my task. I found the first post I sought, with such violent alacrity and collision, that I nearly plunged overboard. My sandolo creaked a little, but it stood the crash well. There the first, and, I may say, most grave of this series of disasters that followed, overtook me. I lost my oar ! I clung to the post with one hand, lighted my torch and sought for the oar, but it had been carried swiftly out of my sight. I was simply in despair ! Midnight, cold, dismal, feverish, exhausted with the hard travail of the day, clinging to a solitary post in the wide sea, the tide ready to hurl me into the Adriatic the minute I relinquished my hold, and still only three posts from the solving of my bitter secret ! I swung my torch wildly, hal-

loored for Donalds, thinking he might be lying in wait for me ; but no answer greeted my faint, scarcely recognizable cry. The lights of the city sparkling and gleamed beyond, but not a sound save the stroke of St. Marco's dismal bell and the cry of a gondolier in the distance. I was stunned at my defeat, and sank back in my narrow sandalo, resolved to wait till daybreak and hail the first market *barca* that passed down the channel to the city.

Fully an hour did I lie there clinging to that post, staring into the darkness, wondering if Jack could see my torch and come from his hiding to greet me, listening to the rushing of the tide at my bow, and magnifying all trivial possibilities into things of horror. I had not even a rope to make fast, and was in utmost misery. Once in a while I swung my torch, but no one greeted my signaling, and I began to reason most devoutly, not with the rushing impulses that characterized my thought of late ; but with the calm, indignant spirit that points a javelin with a sharp tip, and dips it into poison at that.

"Could it be," thought I aloud, "that Jack Donalds is only playing one of his insane pranks on me after all? Could it be that he sent me this letter to silence me that I would cease searching him till midnight, by which time he could be far beyond our most hopeful clews?"


Each moment growing more bitter and weary, each moment more stiff, cold and benumbed of my senses by hunger and thirst, I at last must have yielded to this horrible aching for sleep, and fell into a short fit of slumber. I suddenly awoke to find myself into the channel again, being carried out with the tide! I was horrified at the probability of my floating out a hundred miles into the sea by day-break, and lighting my torch again — I had extinguished it in the meantime to hide myself — rolled up my sleeves plunged my arms into the cold water, and paddled in the direction of the line of posts. I was finally rewarded. One of the posts neared me — which one I had no idea — but I paddled desperately toward it, and was relieved to find my effort successful. I struck the post as violently as I had the first one, hours be-

fore, and so threw my arms around it. I began to calculate, and made up my mind that I had passed none, but that this was the second post from the San Giorgio wall. The nearer I drew to the mysterious fourth post, where my thirst for this seizing draught would at last be sated, the more conquering became my desire to solve this spontaneous stroke of occultism of Jack Donalds. At the fourth pillar I would either find him or the letter. Assured that no Jack Donalds had been there since my arrival, I was seized at this bitter extreme of exhaustion and suspense, with a maddened determination to reach that fourth post. I hesitated a long time before daring so much, and sat many questioning, prayerful moments in the bottom of the sandalo, staring into the black night, beckoning from out the bitter depths all the courage that such bevisioned and begouled darkness could afford me. At last it seemed as if I had grown stronger, — rallied from the exhausted fright of a few moments before, and so risking my life to the accomplishment of my desire, I swung the sandalo around so that it pointed at what I be-

lieved to be the proper angle, let go the post that was my sole anchorage, fell on my face in the bottom of the boat, plunged my arms into the cold water, striking out desperately and blindly in the direction. The tide seemed to have increased in the interval, and it seemed the grim post I had left shot out from me with a curse as if I were a thing it now abhorred. My eye must have lost its keen penetration, or else the torch died somewhat, leaving me blinder than ever, for just as I thought I would near the third post which was to serve me a solemn anchorage on this bitter pilgrimage of penance and wonder, I was horrified beyond measure to find that I had just passed it, and that it was now far beyond recovery! With the desperation of a man who is saving his life at the climax of solving the one problem of his days, I plunged my arms into the water once more, and struck out, much as a buoyed up swimmer, for the fourth, — the fatal post. "If I miss this, it is all over!" I cried loudly enough to wake the goblins of the sea beneath me, for my strength was so far overwhelmed that

to strike for and attain any of the pillars further on, would have been beyond my endurance. My eyes grew dim in the strained position, and the splashing of the salt water into my face nearly blinded me. On, on, on I plunged, each moment pausing, lifting high the torch and peering into that horrible void beyond, invoking all the ministrations of good cheer upon my suffering dependence, and dashing again to my task! Once or twice I paused sceptically, wondering if I had not already passed the pillar as I had the third, for the moments seemed hours indeed, and at last after one or two more desperate lashings of the water in the direction of my prize, I fell back in the bottom of the boat with a groan! It seemed as if I had fallen into a sort of a stupor, for I saw all sorts of horrible shapes in a pale, freezing sort of glamour, swimming about me with a throbbing uncertainty of motion, and finally was aroused from my trembling sort of vertigo by a crash and a violent swaying of the bark that brought me to my feet! My sandalo had struck the post I had so laboriously sought, and had now quite

given up, and I stood tottering and amazed before it. It looked like a horrible green-bearded spectre risen out of the slimy sea to greet and command me to judgment for some deed of my unconscious but criminal doing' I was so horrified at the picturing my imagination made of the solitary thing, that I fairly shrank from it instead of clasping it as was my most desperate but unrealizing expedient, and thanking God it was mine, —so dazzled at the grim visitant now turned a thing of repulsion to me, that it was not till I recovered to find myself floating beyond its mooring safety, that I flung aside the vision of my imbecility, and uttering wild a cry of waking, made one seizing dash of reprisal after the phantom, but my violent thrust fell far short! Suddenly a little fluttering bit of paper pinned high up near the top of the post seemed to beckon me with a maddening entreaty! "The letter!—the letter! It is there!..." I cried; and then bending down, with a madman's rallying to his uncertain conquest, I tore out one of the braces of the sandalo which extends from end to end, swung it



around, whipped the retreating post once or twice, when to my inexpressible thankfulness at heart, it caught on one of the rusty nails, and so retained me. Slowly, cautiously, I drew the frail craft with an entreating motion forward against the tide, and an exhausted but thankful moment later, stood conqueror beside my prize, my arms clasped about the thing I had but a moment gone so abhorred, and which had appeared to me by the fierce fire light of a conceiving, weakened brain, a thing of such bitter repulsion !

It was some moments before I roused myself from this alternating stupor which came upon me as in waves and throbbings of seizing weakness and realization ; but finally I did the most imprudent thing of all, perhaps, I took off my coat, tore it in pieces, and bound the sandalo fast to the pillar. Then I sank relievedly back in the bottom of the little boat, and stared at the fluttering letter which hung there above me. It was far beyond my reach. The tide had gone down some four feet since it had been placed there, and the coveted missive hung now so many feet beyond my arm's-lengths. 'What a fool to leave

a letter in such a place!' I cried. 'O Jack Donalds! why do I cringe to your culpable trumpety?—why humor you in this unreasoning, sacrificing way, and consent to be baited into such vexation and peril to further your bewildering projects? Why have I never ceased for a single hour since the night I gave you that fated parchment volume of Ariosto, to dream of you, follow up that dream with wonder, follow up that wonder with labor, my searching, my faithfulest sacrifice of purse and pride, and now almost my life, that I may deliver you from temptation and your pressing enemies,—that I may prove you not a madman, while my heart belies the prompting in the deed! What fool's puppetry have I enacted at your perplexing command to no issue of good! God help me from this horrible place, restore to me my senses and independence, and I shall drown your dark image forever from my sight!' But the entreating and ever-tantalizing flutter of the mysterious sheet waved like some vital message from the black Unseen beyond, and as my strength increased and my rallying heart waved

away these pale illusions from my magnifying eyes, I rose to my task of gaining it. Evidently my only possibility to success was to take off my shoes and stockings, climb the slimy pillar and so secure the missive. My hat was lost overboard at the first venture, my coat torn in shreds to serve the second, and I was already stunned with cold and anxiety. To take off my shoes and stockings was a task which I hesitated and reasoned amicably over ere venturing upon, but at last, after drawing two or three vital breaths of inspiration determined to the luckless issue from that throbbing bit of paper hanging aloft, I took the incumbrance from my feet. The cold stung me and hastened the accomplishment of my task. I clasped my hands around the post, made a few desperate dashes to climb it, but the futility of my endeavor was soon proven me. The very thought of leaving my bark for even so small a portion of a moment, trusting to this insecure footing, halted my project, and lifted before my marvelling eyes a vision of a man pinioned to a pillar in the sea for a night, all with such startling precis-

ion of outline, that I readily overruled my imprudent impulse, and relinquished the task. I trimmed my torch, and by its aid, bent one of the nails in that long brace which had so well served me, and with this tool, began the most wearisome manœuvres, hooking the fluttering missive readily enough two or three times, but not having the courage to pull it down. What might it contain, after all?—what revealment of anguish I was certainly in no warrior mood to sustain? Still it was first duty I owed to him and me,—and second, I felt that the relief following the deed so amicably well done, might regain for me much of my out-conquered courage. Again I hooked the missive, and paused wondering. What if it should fall into the sea and the tide carry it out beyond me! To insure against such a disaster, I untied the shreds that moored my bark, intent upon following the missive should it escape me in its descent. But ah! what possibility to peril came not into the mind now grown so almost impervious to disaster, and almost stolid before surprises and revelations of the most scourging kind. I clung to the pile with

one hand, and with a rash stroke, a faint hiss and a stagger to catch my balance, I snatched down the mysterious sheet. I caught it in mid-air, and with a groan of relief fell back into the bottom of the boat, clasping the strange missive to my bosom. I closed my eyes!—it seemed that I lay embalmed in some new element — as if some new spirituality had transfused the old, and I was a creature indeed of a new, profound and somewhat idem-nifying sensation!... I opened my eyes. The secret lay throbbing on my bosom at last ; all else of suffering in body and mind, all else that had passed like a bewildering, feverish dream, and all that should follow hard in the wake of this new epoch—all was now oblivion. The one triumph filled me, the one hope sustained me. The weird missive was cold. I tried to warm it: it would not warm. I thrust it to my naked bosom — it was clammy and chilling, and the confident warmth I hoped to find in it, was not there. A new sensation of horror seized and chilled me ; I shrank from it with all my endeavors to caress, — shrank from it with the scourging revulsion of one who

hates even in the frenzy of his love. The strange missive seemed to throb with a pulsation likened to a serpent on my heart. Alas! what if that which I had hoped might prove a blessing should now turn and sting the heart that warmed it? I was surprised at my changed spirit, nor could I reason it away any more than reason down that exultant space of triumph the moment before. Where now was my courage dispersed? — that courage which had fostered me a spirit brave enough to gain this one conquest, and then leave me cold, benumbed, thirsting at heart, parched at the lips, anguished of mind as of body, sick of the very disease of hoping? . . . But why need I portray all the afflicting vagaries, all the blind, hapless wonderings and the cold aspersions following these thoughts of love and tenderness that flashed into my half-insensible, half-believing brain at that hour? Though it be painted so indelibly and viciously clear upon this aftermath of visions that sprung up on the wreck of that dismal night and shall so live indissolubly fixed forever, I cannot now portray them to your unrealizing

eyes, nor can I convince myself that I am shadowing forth in the faintest evidence, the truth that lies within the truth.

I opened my eyes and stared about me. The pillar still stood beside my bark, and the frail shreds still moored me to it as if the scourging Destinies that centred about this spectral landmark in the sea, refused my privilege to wander beyond their province. Somewhat rallied by the realization that I was not afloat at random as was my hallucination a moment gone, I rose from my prostrate attitude, knelt in the bottom of the little bark, snatched the letter from my bosom, and thanking God that the secret was here, prodded on my delinquent courage to make it mine! I drew the flickering torch to my side, and with devout spirit and a listening, believing heart, read the following words :—

“O Van....Van! why did you ever cross my path....with that death-smelling monster? — that thing of peril which now hurls upon me the final thunderbolt of my disastrously unhappy days, and flings me into the bosom of eternity without a prayer, without a heaven — yes, I

dare confess it to *you*, Van, even if not to the God of my sweet, sweet mother,—without a Christ—but no, no!—this is too horrible a confession even to you. You came to me, Van, even in the midst of my declining days, came to me and solved my problem. You told me to marry her.... I thought your advice madness—a most brutal philosophy wherewith to soothe my wounds; but I soon conquered these churlish scruples,—my pride, my insane believing that I loved her not—only admired her, and so forgot that this beautiful vision of peace and love whom I so truly learned to serve and longed to bless with my poor, yielding affection, was the daughter of the man whose father a few removes beyond, was my father's murderer. Yes, dear boy I conquered all this, forgave it though unasked, and the way through her to heaven thus unbarred and free to my ascendant and hopeful step, *I loved her*.... I grew brave in this hopeful realization, brave only as that giant's calm after a desperate self-conquest may make a man whose mind is narrowed down to such a poignant edge by this resolving self-ex-

action, and so planned my gentle siege. I would go to her and win her, and, after all was complete and assured, tell her the secret which you and I, yes, and to my sorrow, the world already knows. How beautiful was this dream to me! No longer seemed she the thing of horror that in the earliest days of my searchings, I had pictured her; but now as a benignant spirit of honor and peace and heart's-ease, and that silent, believing love that should yet reward my over-penitent days. How clear, how spiritually wise this possibility! But between this hoped-for realization and me, there stood a great wall — a most uncertain barrier which I, with the violent resolve upon me, respected not. I had engaged counsel — the most eminent and surest of success in the kingdom, — and they were to retain half of the Dondolo estate for the pursuing of the claim. This stands so nominated and signed in the bond at this moment. They mistrusted my new project; I confessed it to them manfully. They plead with me, but I was incorrigible. They threatened me, but I was a stone satire before all their warning; and still the while,

this sealed bond hung about my neck like a fateful albatross, leading me to judgment! . . . At last they concluded among them that the better plan would be to apprise Marie Selini as I had promised to do, but had so signally failed. The result of their interview may be briefly told; for it came upon me like a thunderbolt in the night, laying bare the whole reproachful world to me in its thin lightning flash. My gondolier rushed into my room and told me of the disappearance of Marie Selini! I took it as an idle rumor, and felt in my heart that she had simply gone into seclusion for a little time, bearing my appealing missive upon her bosom. I dismissed my gondolier, who stood amazed at my reluctance to believe him, and settled down to labor on that mysterious *Quarto* of the confession of Marco Dondolo. About midnight that inscrutable line which has baffled me all these demanding months—that line which proved the madness of my whole errand of reprisal, became evident to me. But for the hope that the letter I had despatched to her, would be gratefully received, I would have hurled myself from the bal-

cony into the sea. I read that *Quarto*, and stood a craven before it! I read it all, Van — learned the truth you so slyly housed up in your heart and withheld from me for fear of my doing some deed of desperation which you were right to conjecture, learned that I had no claim before God to the Dondolo estate, that I am not a descendant of the good Doge Dondolo by a righteous lineage — that I am simply a nobody — an outcast bearing the name that before God I have no right to bear, — though no fault of mine — and that this is not my lawful privilege! This revelation fell upon me with a most crushing conviction. It was midnight: I still had till morning to determine. Bagley came in and confirmed the gondolier's tidings as to the disappearance of Marie Selini, and I resolved upon a new measure to the accomplishment of my task. I should search her out, tell her the truth, confide in her, and together we should steal out of this horrible port of alarms — fly to my home, my country, and when all is over, return and abide contented. What wrong had I committed in keeping from the eager listening of the world, the

truth that that mysterious *Quarto* was yet unsolved? Ah, how it changed and proved me the madman that I am!.... But it is all over now, Van, I rant no longer; I am calm, resigned, understandingly courageous and ready for the worst which soon comes.

.

I write this in my gondola, dear Van, alone and by candle-light. I sent you word to meet me here, and yes, dear comrade of my heart, you may yet, if you are wise and sharp-eyed enough, you may meet me! But I must tell all, and leave the world's judgment in your hands. Exhonorate me if you can; if not, condemn me.... At daybreak I received an answer to my pleading prayer to poor Marie. It was a letter that transported me to heaven from my den of dismal in the twinkling of an eye. It was a simple, refined, tender compliance with my beseeching request,—she *would* meet me, and together we should fly to another land. She trusted in me, she hoped in me, and maintained that all should yet be well. Ah, could I have but read the satire in her words!—but—but she told me

to meet her here, Van, even here at this very spot where she had so often seen our gondola moored, and charged me not to disappoint her. I was overwhelmed of my triumph! I came, dear Van, — God bless you, keep you, spare you the anguish I have suffered all these whiles! — came and found her, and together we have fled, and may the good Lord have mercy on our souls!"

JACK DONALDS.

I dashed the letter from my stinging eyes with a faint cry of wonder, snatched the sputtering torch from my side, staggered to my feet, clasped my arms about the slimy pillar for support, held the blazing beacon out over the water, peering down, down into the green depths! There, side by side, lay the peaceful, up-turned faces of Marie Selini and Jack Donalds!

This is all I remember.

THE END.

6

Legt

